

Official Report of the
One Hundred Seventy-fourth
Annual General

CONFERENCE

of The Church of Jesus Christ
of Latter-day Saints

held in the Conference Center
Salt Lake City, Utah

3–4 April, 2004

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Report of the 174th Annual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

The 174th Annual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints convened in the Conference Center in Salt Lake City, Utah, on Saturday, April 3, 2004, at 10:00 a.m.

The general sessions of the conference were held at 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday, April 3 and 4, 2004. The general priesthood session was held on Saturday, April 3, at 6:00 p.m.

President Gordon B. Hinckley presided at all sessions of the conference. President Thomas S. Monson conducted the Sunday morning and Sunday afternoon sessions. President James E. Faust conducted the Saturday morning, Saturday afternoon, and priesthood sessions.

The conference was carried by satellite transmission to thousands of Church buildings in many countries. In areas that did not receive this transmission, videotapes of the conference were sent to local distribution centers and made available to all Church units. In addition, television and radio stations and the LDS Radio Network carried portions or all of the general sessions to large audiences throughout North America. The proceedings were also broadcast live over the Internet.

General Authorities

First Presidency: Gordon B. Hinckley, Thomas S. Monson, and James E. Faust

Quorum of the Twelve Apostles: Boyd K. Packer, L. Tom Perry, David B. Haight, Neal A. Maxwell, Russell M. Nelson, Dallin H. Oaks, M. Russell Ballard, Joseph B. Wirthlin, Richard G. Scott, Robert D. Hales, Jeffrey R. Holland, and Henry B. Eyring

Presidency of the Seventy: Earl C. Tingey, D. Todd Christofferson, David E. Sorensen, Charles Didier, Dieter F.

Uchtdorf, Merrill J. Bateman, and John H. Groberg

First Quorum of the Seventy: Carlos H. Amado, Neil L. Andersen, Monte J. Brough, Sheldon F. Child, L. Whitney Clayton, Gary J. Coleman, Spencer J. Condie, Gene R. Cook, Quentin L. Cook, Claudio R. M. Costa, Robert K. Dellenbach, John B. Dickson, Christoffel Golden Jr., Walter F. González, Bruce C. Hafen, Donald L. Hallstrom, F. Melvin Hammond, Harold G. Hillam, F. Burton Howard, Jay E. Jensen, Marlin K. Jensen, Kenneth Johnson, W. Rolfe Kerr, Yoshihiko Kikuchi, John M. Madsen, Richard J. Maynes, Lynn A. Mickelsen, Dennis B. Neuenschwander, Glenn L. Pace, Bruce D. Porter, Carl B. Pratt, Ronald A. Rasband, Lynn G. Robbins, Cecil O. Samuelson Jr., Steven E. Snow, Francisco J. Viñas, Lance B. Wickman, and W. Craig Zwick

Second Quorum of the Seventy: Mervyn B. Arnold, E. Ray Bateman, Douglas L. Callister, Craig C. Christensen, Shirley D. Christensen, Val R. Christensen, Darwin B. Christenson, Keith Crockett, Adhemar Damiani, James M. Dunn, Daryl H. Garn, D. Rex Gerratt, H. Aldridge Gillespie, Ronald T. Halverson, Keith K. Hilbig, Spencer V. Jones, Gerald N. Lund, Clate W. Mask Jr., Dale E. Miller, Merrill C. Oaks, Robert C. Oaks, Robert F. Orton, Stephen B. Oveson, William W. Parmley, Wayne S. Peterson, H. Bryan Richards, Ned B. Roueché, R. Conrad Schultz, W. Douglas Shumway, Dennis E. Simmons, Donald L. Staheli, Robert R. Steuer, David R. Stone, H. Bruce Stucki, William R. Walker, Gordon T. Watts, Stephen A. West, Robert J. Whetten, Richard H. Winkel, Robert S. Wood, and H. Ross Workman

Presiding Bishopric: H. David Burton, Richard C. Edgley, and Keith B. McMullin

SATURDAY MORNING SESSION

The first session of the 174th Annual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints convened in the Conference Center in Salt Lake City, Utah, at 10:00 a.m. on Saturday, April 3, 2004. President James E. Faust conducted this session.

Music was provided by the Tabernacle Choir. Craig Jessop and Mack Wilberg directed the choir, and Clay Christiansen was the organist. To begin this session, the choir sang "Press Forward, Saints." President Faust then made the following remarks.

President James E. Faust

We welcome you to this, the first general session of the 174th Annual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. President Gordon B. Hinckley, who presides at this conference, has asked that I, Brother Faust, conduct this session.

We acknowledge the General Authorities seated on the stand in the Conference Center and at the overflow locations in the Tabernacle and the Assembly Hall. We likewise acknowledge the Relief Society, Young Men, Young Women, Sunday School, and Primary general presidencies in attendance at this conference.

We extend a special welcome to government, education, and civic leaders who are present with us.

We are grateful to the owners and operators of the many television and radio stations and satellite and cable systems for offering facilities as a public service to bring this conference to a large audience in many areas of the world. We are also pleased to make available these proceedings via the Internet at lds.org.

The music for this session will be by the Tabernacle Choir, under the direction of Craig Jessop and Mack Wilberg, with Clay Christiansen at the organ.

The choir opened this session by singing "Press Forward, Saints" and will now sing "For the Beauty of the Earth." The invocation will then be offered by Elder Ronald A. Rasband of the Seventy.

The choir sang "For the Beauty of the Earth."

Elder Ronald A. Rasband offered the invocation.

President Faust

It will now be our privilege to hear from President Gordon B. Hinckley, our beloved prophet.

President Gordon B. Hinckley

The Church grows stronger

My beloved brethren and sisters, we warmly welcome you to another worldwide conference of the Church. We are now a great international family, living in many nations and speaking many languages. To me it is a marvelous and miraculous thing that you are able to see us and hear us across the globe.

During my life as a General Authority, we have moved from the time when we thought it a remarkable thing that we could speak in the Salt Lake Tabernacle and be heard by radio throughout the state of Utah. Now we are assembled in this great and magnificent Conference Center, and our images and words are available to 95 percent of the membership of the Church.

New technology has become available as the Church has grown larger and stronger. Our membership now reaches almost 12 million, with more members outside North America than within. Once we were recognized as a Utah church. Now we have become a great international body.

We have made a very long journey in reaching out to the nations of the world. There is much more yet to be done, but what has been accomplished is truly phenomenal.

Strong and committed members

It is a fact that we lose some—far too many. Every organization of which I am aware does so. But I am satisfied that we retain and keep active a higher percentage of our members than does any other major church of which I know.

Everywhere there is great activity and great enthusiasm. We have strong and able leaders across the world who give of their time and means to move the work forward.

It is wonderfully refreshing to see the faith and faithfulness of our young people. They live at a time when a great tide of evil is washing over the earth. It seems to be everywhere. Old standards are discarded. Principles of virtue and integrity are cast aside. But we find literally hundreds of thousands of our young people holding to the high standards of the gospel. They find happy and uplifting association with those of their own kind. They are improving their minds with education and their skills with discipline, and their influence for good is felt ever more widely.

Construction and humanitarian efforts

I am pleased to report, my brothers and sisters, that the Church is in good condition. We continue to build temples, to construct houses of worship, to carry forward many projects of construction and

improvement, all made possible because of the faith of our people.

We are carrying on a great humanitarian effort, which is blessing the lives of many of the less fortunate of the earth and those who are the victims of the catastrophes of nature.

Changing attitudes toward the Church

We are pleased to note that on April 1 of this year, the Illinois House of Representatives unanimously passed a resolution of regret for the forced expulsion of our people from Nauvoo in 1846. This magnanimous gesture may be coupled with action taken by then Governor Christopher S. Bond of Missouri, who in 1976 revoked the cruel and unconstitutional extermination order issued against our people by Governor Lilburn W. Boggs in 1838.

These and other developments represent a most significant change of attitude toward the Latter-day Saints.

Expression of gratitude and blessing

How deeply grateful I feel to each of you and all of you for your dedicated and consecrated service. I thank you for your many kindnesses to me wherever I go. I stand as your servant, ready and willing to assist you in any way that I can.

God bless you, my dear associates. How I love you. How I pray for you. How I thank you.

May heaven smile upon you. May there be love and harmony, peace and goodness in your homes. May you be preserved from harm and evil. May our Father's "great plan of happiness" (Alma 42:8) become the standard by which you live. I ask it humbly and gratefully in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

It will now be our pleasure to hear from our beloved associate Elder David B. Haight of the Quorum of the Twelve, who is now 97 years of age. Elder Haight, come up here and speak to your multitudinous friends.

Elder David B. Haight

How great the wisdom and the love

I stand here with a humble heart—a heart that is full of love for this work, for you people who are here and who are listening. At our last conference six months ago as I stood here by President Gordon B. Hinckley, he encouraged me to wave to you, and I used all the energy that I had. I've heard from some people who thought I was waving a farewell. But I've come here today to indicate to you and to tell you I'm back. And I don't have anyone else pushing my arm for me.

I understand the power of prayer and of faith and devotion, and I acknowledge precious witnesses from heaven. And so I stand here today just to bear my testimony and say hello to you. I'm hoping that by another conference I'll be totally healed and able to do what I'm asked to do.

God lives. He is our Father—our Father in Heaven.

Eliza R. Snow, who wrote some of our famous music, particularly sacrament music, wrote the words:

How great the wisdom and the love
That filled the courts on high.

Just run that through your mind for a second—because we were there.

How great the wisdom and the love
That filled the courts on high
And sent the Savior from above
To suffer, bleed, and die!
[“How Great the Wisdom and the Love,” *Hymns*, no. 195]

We chose to come here. And so we're here, assembled in this vast auditorium, where we can speak to each other and

bear witness and bear testimony. I assure you that in those sleepless nights that I've had at times, when you attempt to solve all of your problems and to make new resolutions of things that need to be done, I have had those heavenly thoughts that lift us. God our Heavenly Father loves us, as we should love Him. He selected His Son to come to earth and bring the gospel of Jesus Christ, for whom this Church is named and which we bear witness to. I am honored to stand and bear witness today of the foundation of this Church and of our love for President Hinckley, who leads us today.

The gospel is true. I know it; I'm a witness of it. In the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, amen.

The choir sang “My Heavenly Father Loves Me.”

President Faust

The choir just sang “My Heavenly Father Loves Me.”

We will now be pleased to hear from Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, after which we will hear from Elder D. Todd Christofferson of the Presidency of the Seventy. The choir and congregation will then sing “Now Let Us Rejoice.”

Following the singing, we will hear from Sister Gayle M. Clegg, second counselor in the Primary general presidency. Elder Henry B. Eyring of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles will then address us. He will be followed by the choir singing “We Are Sowing.”

Elder Dallin H. Oaks

Preparation for the Second Coming

In modern revelation we have the promise that if we are prepared we need not fear (see D&C 38:30). I was introduced to that principle 60 years ago this summer when I became a Boy Scout and learned the Scout motto: “Be prepared.” Today I have felt prompted to speak of the importance of preparation for a future event of supreme importance to each of us—the Second Coming of the Lord.

The scriptures are rich in references to the Second Coming, an event eagerly awaited by the righteous and dreaded or denied by the wicked. The faithful of all ages have pondered the sequence and meaning of the many events prophesied to precede and follow this hinge point of history.

Four matters are indisputable to Latter-day Saints: (1) The Savior will return to the earth in power and great glory to reign personally during a millennium of righteousness and peace. (2) At the time of His coming there will be a destruction of the wicked and a resurrection of the righteous. (3) No one knows the time of His coming, but (4) the faithful are taught to study the signs of it and to be prepared for it. I wish to speak about the fourth of these great realities: the signs of the Second Coming and what we should do to prepare for it.

Signs of the Second Coming

The Lord has declared, “He that fear-eth me shall be looking forth for the great day of the Lord to come, even for the signs of the coming of the Son of Man,” signs that will be shown “in the heavens above, and in the earth beneath” (D&C 45:39–40).

The Savior taught this in the parable of the fig tree whose tender new branches give a sign of the coming of summer. “So

likewise,” when the elect shall see the signs of His coming, “they shall know that he is near, even at the doors” (Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:38–39; see also Matthew 24:32–33; D&C 45:37–38).

Biblical and modern prophecies give many signs of the Second Coming. These include:

1. The fulness of the gospel restored and preached in all the world for a witness to all nations.
2. False Christs and false prophets, deceiving many.
3. Wars and rumors of wars, with nation rising against nation.
4. Earthquakes in divers places.
5. Famine and pestilence.
6. An overflowing scourge, a desolating sickness covering the land.
7. Iniquity abounding.
8. The whole earth in commotion.
9. Men’s hearts failing them.

(See Matthew 24:5–15; Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:22, 28–32; D&C 45:26–33.)

In another revelation the Lord declares that some of these signs are His voice calling His people to repentance:

“Hearken, O ye nations of the earth, and hear the words of that God who made you. . . .

“How oft have I called upon you by the mouth of my servants, and by the ministering of angels, and by mine own voice, and by the voice of thunderings, and by the voice of lightnings, and by the voice of tempests, and by the voice of earthquakes, and great hailstorms, and by the voice of famines and pestilences of every kind, . . . and would have saved you with an everlasting salvation, but ye would not!” (D&C 43:23, 25).

These signs of the Second Coming are all around us and seem to be increasing in frequency and intensity. For example, the list of major earthquakes in *The World Almanac and Book of Facts, 2004* shows

twice as many earthquakes in the decades of the 1980s and 1990s as in the two preceding decades (see pages 189–90). It also shows further sharp increases in the first several years of this century. The list of notable floods and tidal waves and the list of hurricanes, typhoons, and blizzards worldwide show similar increases in recent years (see pages 188–89). Increases by comparison with 50 years ago can be dismissed as changes in reporting criteria, but the accelerating pattern of natural disasters in the last few decades is ominous.

The gathering

Another sign of the times is the gathering of the faithful (see D&C 133:4). In the early years of this last dispensation, a gathering to Zion involved various locations in the United States: to Kirtland, to Missouri, to Nauvoo, and to the tops of the mountains. Always these were gatherings to prospective temples.

With the creation of stakes and the construction of temples in most nations with sizable populations of the faithful, the current commandment is not to gather to one place but to gather in stakes in our own homelands. There the faithful can enjoy the full blessings of eternity in a house of the Lord. There, in their own homelands, they can obey the Lord's command to enlarge the borders of His people and strengthen her stakes (see D&C 101:21; 133:9, 14). In this way the stakes of Zion are "for a defense, and for a refuge from the storm, and from wrath when it shall be poured out without mixture upon the whole earth" (D&C 115:6).

Accelerating our preparation

While we are powerless to alter the fact of the Second Coming and unable to know its exact time, we can accelerate our own preparation and try to influence the preparation of those around us.

A parable that contains an important and challenging teaching on this subject

is the parable of the ten virgins. Of this parable the Lord said, "And at that day, when I shall come in my glory, shall the parable be fulfilled which I spake concerning the ten virgins" (D&C 45:56).

Given in the 25th chapter of Matthew, this parable contrasts the circumstances of the five foolish and the five wise virgins. All ten were invited to the wedding feast, but only half of them were prepared with oil in their lamps when the bridegroom came. The five who were prepared went into the marriage feast, and the door was shut. The five who had delayed their preparations came late. The door had been closed, and the Lord denied them entrance, saying, "I know you not" (v. 12). "Watch therefore," the Savior concluded, "for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh" (v. 13).

The arithmetic of this parable is chilling. The ten virgins obviously represent members of Christ's Church, for all were invited to the wedding feast and all knew what was required to be admitted when the bridegroom came. But only half were ready when he came.

Modern revelation contains this teaching, spoken by the Lord to the early leaders of the Church:

"And after your testimony cometh wrath and indignation upon the people.

"For after your testimony cometh the testimony of earthquakes. . . .

"And . . . the testimony of the voice of thunderings, and the voice of lightnings, and the voice of tempests, and the voice of the waves of the sea heaving themselves beyond their bounds.

"And all things shall be in commotion; and surely, men's hearts shall fail them; for fear shall come upon all people.

"And angels shall fly through the midst of heaven, crying with a loud voice, sounding the trump of God, saying: Prepare ye, prepare ye, O inhabitants of the earth; for the judgment of our God is come. Behold, and lo, the Bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him" (D&C 88:88–92).

Begin preparations today

Brothers and sisters, as the Book of Mormon teaches, “this life is the time for men to prepare to meet God; . . . the day of this life is the day for men to perform their labors” (Alma 34:32). Are we preparing?

In His preface to our compilation of modern revelation, the Lord declares, “Prepare ye, prepare ye for that which is to come, for the Lord is nigh” (D&C 1:12).

The Lord also warned: “Yea, let the cry go forth among all people: Awake and arise and go forth to meet the Bridegroom; behold and lo, the Bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Prepare yourselves for the great day of the Lord” (D&C 133:10; see also D&C 34:6).

Always we are cautioned that we cannot know the day or the hour of His coming. In the 24th chapter of Matthew, Jesus taught:

“Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.

“But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up” (Matthew 24:42–43). “But would have been ready” (Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:47).

“Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh” (Matthew 24:44; see also D&C 51:20).

What if the day of His coming were tomorrow? If we knew that we would meet the Lord tomorrow—through our premature death or His unexpected coming—what would we do today? What confessions would we make? What practices would we discontinue? What accounts would we settle? What forgivenesses would we extend? What testimonies would we bear?

If we would do those things then, why not now? Why not seek peace while peace can be obtained? If our lamps of preparation are drawn down, let us start immediately to replenish them.

We need to make both temporal and spiritual preparation for the events prophesied at the time of the Second Coming. And the preparation most likely to be neglected is the one less visible and more difficult—the spiritual. A 72-hour kit of temporal supplies may prove valuable for earthly challenges, but, as the foolish virgins learned to their sorrow, a 24-hour kit of spiritual preparation is of greater and more enduring value.

Wickedness is spreading across the earth

We are living in the prophesied time “when peace shall be taken from the earth” (D&C 1:35), when “all things shall be in commotion” and “men’s hearts shall fail them” (D&C 88:91). There are many temporal causes of commotion, including wars and natural disasters, but an even greater cause of current commotion is spiritual.

Viewing our surroundings through the lens of faith and with an eternal perspective, we see all around us a fulfillment of the prophecy that “the devil shall have power over his own dominion” (D&C 1:35). Our hymn describes “the foe in countless numbers, / Marshaled in the ranks of sin” (“Hope of Israel,” *Hymns*, no. 259), and so it is.

Evil that used to be localized and covered like a boil is now legalized and paraded like a banner. The most fundamental roots and bulwarks of civilization are questioned or attacked. Nations disavow their religious heritage. Marriage and family responsibilities are discarded as impediments to personal indulgence. The movies and magazines and television that shape our attitudes are filled with stories or images that portray the children of God as predatory beasts or, at best, as trivial creations pursuing little more than personal pleasure. And too many of us accept this as entertainment.

The men and women who made epic sacrifices to combat evil regimes in the past were shaped by values that are dis-

appearing from our public teaching. The good, the true, and the beautiful are being replaced by the no-good, the “whatever,” and the valueless fodder of personal whim. Not surprisingly, many of our youth and adults are caught up in pornography, pagan piercing of body parts, self-serving pleasure pursuits, dishonest behavior, revealing attire, foul language, and degrading sexual indulgence.

An increasing number of opinion leaders and followers deny the existence of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and revere only the gods of secularism. Many in positions of power and influence deny the right and wrong defined by divine decree. Even among those who profess to believe in right and wrong, there are “them that call evil good, and good evil” (Isaiah 5:20; 2 Nephi 15:20). Many also deny individual responsibility and practice dependence on others, seeking, like the foolish virgins, to live on borrowed substance and borrowed light.

All of this is grievous in the sight of our Heavenly Father, who loves all of His children and forbids every practice that keeps any from returning to His presence.

Standing in holy places

What is the state of our personal preparation for eternal life? The people of God have always been people of covenant. What is the measure of our compliance with covenants, including the sacred promises we made in the waters of baptism, in receiving the holy priesthood, and in the temples of God? Are we promisers who do not fulfill and believers who do not perform?

Are we following the Lord’s command, “Stand ye in holy places, and be not moved, until the day of the Lord come; for behold, it cometh quickly”? (D&C 87:8). What are those “holy places”? Surely they include the temple and its covenants faith-

fully kept. Surely they include a home where children are treasured and parents are respected. Surely the holy places include our posts of duty assigned by priesthood authority, including missions and callings faithfully fulfilled in branches, wards, and stakes.

The righteous need not fear

As the Savior taught in His prophecy of the Second Coming, blessed is the “faithful and wise servant” who is attending to his duty when the Lord comes (see Matthew 24:45–46). As the prophet Nephi taught of that day, “The righteous need not fear” (1 Nephi 22:17; see also 1 Nephi 14:14; D&C 133:44). And modern revelation promises that “the Lord shall have power over his saints” (D&C 1:36).

We are surrounded by challenges on all sides (see 2 Corinthians 4:8–9). But with faith in God, we trust the blessings He has promised those who keep His commandments. We have faith in the future, and we are preparing for that future. To borrow a metaphor from the familiar world of athletic competitions, we do not know when this game will end, and we do not know the final score, but we do know that when the game finally ends, our team wins. We will continue to go forward “till the purposes of God shall be accomplished, and the Great Jehovah shall say the work is done” (*History of the Church*, 4:540).

“Wherefore,” the Savior tells us, “be faithful, praying always, having your lamps trimmed and burning, and oil with you, that you may be ready at the coming of the Bridegroom—For behold, verily, verily, I say unto you, that I come quickly” (D&C 33:17–18).

I testify of Jesus Christ. I testify that He shall come, as He has promised. And I pray that we will be prepared to meet Him, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Elder D. Todd Christofferson

Becoming converted to the gospel

My comments are directed particularly to young people, although I hope they may be helpful to everyone.

Years ago when I served as a stake president, a man came to confess a transgression. His confession surprised me. He had been an active member of the Church for years. I wondered how a person with his experience could have committed the sin that he did. After some pondering, it came to me that this brother had never become truly converted. Despite his Church activity, the gospel had not penetrated his heart. It was only an external influence in his life. When he was in wholesome environments, he kept the commandments, but in a different environment, other influences might control his actions.

How can you become converted? How can you make the gospel of Jesus Christ not just an influence in your life but the controlling influence and, indeed, the very core of what you are? The ancient prophet Jeremiah spoke of the law of God—the gospel—being written in our hearts. He quotes the Lord speaking about us, His people in the latter days: “I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.”¹

Do you want this for yourself? I can tell you how that can happen, but it must be something you want. The gospel cannot be written in your heart unless your heart is open. Without a heartfelt desire, you can participate in sacrament meetings, classes, and Church activities and do the things I will tell you, but it won’t make much difference. But if your heart is open and willing, like the heart of a child,² let me tell you what you can do to be converted.

Lay aside pride and submit to God

As a first step, you must lay aside any feeling of pride that is so common in the world today. By this I mean the attitude that rejects the authority of God to rule in our lives. This attitude was described by the Lord to Joseph Smith when He said, “They seek not the Lord to establish his righteousness, but every man walketh in his own way, and after the image of his own god.”³ You hear it expressed today in phrases such as “Do your own thing” or “Right and wrong depend on what I feel is right for me.” That attitude is a rebellion against God, just as Lucifer rebelled against God in the premortal world. He rejected God’s right to declare the truth and establish the law.⁴ Satan wanted, and still wants, the power to declare arbitrarily what is right and wrong. Our beloved Creator does not force us to accept His authority, but willingly submitting to that authority is the first step in conversion.

Study the scriptures

Further, for the gospel to be written in your heart, you need to know what it is and grow to understand it more fully. That means you will study it.⁵ When I say *study*, I mean something more than reading. It is a good thing sometimes to read a book of scripture within a set period of time to get an overall sense of its message, but for conversion you should care more about the amount of time you spend in the scriptures than about the amount you read in that time. I see you sometimes reading a few verses, stopping to ponder them, carefully reading the verses again, and as you think about what they mean, praying for understanding, asking questions in your mind, waiting for spiritual impressions, and

writing down the impressions and insights that come so you can remember and learn more. Studying in this way, you may not read a lot of chapters or verses in a half hour, but you will be giving place in your heart for the word of God, and He will be speaking to you. Remember Alma's description of what it feels like: "It beginneth to enlarge my soul; yea, it beginneth to enlighten my understanding, yea, it beginneth to be delicious to me."⁶ You will know that the gospel is being written in your heart, that your conversion is happening, as the word of the Lord from His prophets, past and present, feels more and more delicious to your soul.

Pray with your whole soul

I mentioned praying as you study to understand the scriptures, but your prayers must not be limited to that. In the Book of Mormon, Amulek tells us we should pray about everything in our lives. He says, "Pour out your souls [to God] in your closets, and your secret places, and in your wilderness."⁷ Your Heavenly Father wants you to pray about your hopes and fears, your friends and family, your school and work, and the needs of those around you. Most of all, you should pray to be filled with the love of Christ. This love is given to those who are true followers of Jesus Christ, who ask for it with all the energy of their hearts.⁸ This love is the fruit of the tree of life,⁹ and tasting it is a major part of your conversion because once you have felt your Savior's love for you, even the smallest part, you will feel secure, and a love for Him and for your Heavenly Father will grow within you. In your heart you will want to do what these holy beings ask of you. Go often to your closet, your secret place, your wilderness. Thank God for your blessings; ask for His help; ask Him to bestow upon you the pure love of Christ. Sometimes fasting will help.

Serve others

After Amulek talked about prayer, he spoke about something else that is an important element of your conversion—serving others. Otherwise, he said, "your prayer is vain, and availeth you nothing."¹⁰ In other words, to be converted, you must not only open your heart to a knowledge of the gospel and the love of God, you must practice the gospel law. You cannot fully understand or appreciate it unless you personally apply it in your life. Jesus said that He came to serve, not to be served.¹¹ So it must be with you. You must look outward and care about others. You can be compassionate; you can be friendly; you can share; you can help others in a hundred small ways. As you do, the gospel of Jesus Christ will become a part of you.

Have a repentant heart, a contrite spirit

Let me mention one other thing. In ancient times when people wanted to worship the Lord and seek His blessings, they often brought a gift. For example, when they went to the temple, they brought a sacrifice to place on the altar. After His Atonement and Resurrection, the Savior said He would no longer accept burnt offerings of animals. The gift or sacrifice He will accept now is "a broken heart and a contrite spirit."¹² As you seek the blessing of conversion, you can offer the Lord the gift of your broken, or repentant, heart and your contrite, or obedient, spirit. In reality, it is the gift of yourself—what you are and what you are becoming.

Is there something in you or in your life that is impure or unworthy? When you get rid of it, that is a gift to the Savior. Is there a good habit or quality that is lacking in your life? When you adopt it and make it part of your character, you are giving a gift to the Lord.¹³ Sometimes this is hard to do, but would your gifts of repentance and obedience be worthy gifts if

they cost you nothing?¹⁴ Don't be afraid of the effort required. And remember, you don't have to do it alone. Jesus Christ will help you make of yourself a worthy gift. His grace will make you clean, even holy. Eventually you will become like Him, "perfect in Christ."¹⁵

Conversion brings protection

With conversion you will wear a protective armor—"the whole armour of God"¹⁶—and the words of Christ, which come by the Holy Spirit, "will tell you all things" you should do.¹⁷

In 1992, two sister missionaries in Zagreb, Croatia, were returning to their apartment one evening. Their last teaching appointment had been some distance away, and it was getting dark. Several men on the trolley made crude comments and became rather menacing. Feeling threatened, the sisters got off the trolley at the next stop just as the doors closed so no one could follow them. Having avoided that problem, they realized they were in a place unknown to either of them. As they turned to look for help, they saw a woman. The missionaries explained that they were lost and asked the woman if she could direct them. She knew where they could find another trolley to take them home and invited them to follow her. On the way they had to pass a bar with patrons sitting along the sidewalk in the gathering darkness. These men also appeared threatening. Nevertheless, the two young women had the distinct impression that the men could not see them. They walked by, apparently invisible to those who might have had a mind to harm them. When the sisters and their guide reached the stop, the trolley they needed was just arriving. They turned to thank the woman, but she was nowhere to be seen.¹⁸

These missionaries were furnished a guide and other blessings to protect them physically. As you become converted, you

will have comparable protections to keep you from temptation and deliver you from evil.¹⁹ Sometimes evil will not find you. Sometimes you will be protected when evil is made invisible to you. Even when you must confront it directly, you will do so with faith, not fear.

Gospel written in your mind and heart

We have talked of desire, submissiveness to God, study, prayer, service, repentance, and obedience. From these, coupled with your worship and activity in Church, will come testimony and conversion. The gospel won't be just an influence in your life—it will be what you are. Plead with God in the name of Christ to write the gospel in your mind that you may have understanding and in your heart that you may love to do His will.²⁰ Pursue this blessing diligently and patiently, and you will receive it, for God "is gracious and merciful, . . . and of great kindness."²¹ I so bear witness in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Jeremiah 31:33. Ezekiel said conversion is like the Lord taking away our "stony heart" and giving us a heart that loves Him and His gospel (see Ezekiel 11:19–20). Surely this is what happened to the people of King Benjamin when they said their hearts had been changed and they didn't even want to do evil anymore "but to do good continually" (Mosiah 5:2).
2. See Matthew 18:3–4.
3. Doctrine and Covenants 1:16; see also Helaman 12:6.
4. See Doctrine and Covenants 76:25–29.
5. We are exceptionally fortunate to have so much of the recorded word of God at our fingertips. In prior ages of the world's history, very few people had copies of the scriptures in their possession. They had to try to remember what they could whenever they heard scriptures read in sermons. What an incomparable blessing that you can have your own copy to read whenever

you want. You can see how the gospel works in the lives of people who were converted, from Adam's time down to our own time.

6. Alma 32:28.
7. Alma 34:26.
8. See Moroni 7:47–48.
9. See 1 Nephi 11:21–23.
10. Alma 34:28.
11. See Mark 10:45. The Lord told Peter that when he was converted, he should strengthen his brethren (see Luke 22:32).
12. 3 Nephi 9:20.
13. Along with the scriptures, the pamphlet *For the Strength of Youth* (2001) can guide you.
14. Once when King David prepared to offer a sacrifice to the Lord, a loyal subject said he would give the king the place, the animals, and the firewood to make the sacrifice. But David declined, saying, "I

will surely buy it of thee at a price: neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the Lord my God of that which doth cost me nothing" (2 Samuel 24:24).

15. See Moroni 10:32–33.
16. See Ephesians 6:13–17.
17. 2 Nephi 32:3.
18. As related by Sister Nicole Christoffer-son Miller.
19. See Matthew 6:13.
20. See Hebrews 8:10; 10:16.
21. Joel 2:13. "Draw near unto me and I will draw near unto you; seek me diligently and ye shall find me; ask, and ye shall receive; knock, and it shall be opened unto you" (D&C 88:63).

The choir and congregation sang
"Now Let Us Rejoice."

Sister Gayle M. Clegg

The finished story

Some time ago I found a large white envelope in my mailbox. Inside was a story written by a boy I had taught years before when he was in sixth grade. I remembered the student and the assignment his class had worked on for months. I also remembered that he loved to write and would sit and think and think. Sometimes only a word or two found their way to the page. At times he worked during recess, but when the due date arrived, his story still had a chapter to go. I told him just to turn it in as it was, but Jimmy had a different vision and wanted to turn in a finished story. The last day of class he asked if he could finish during the summer break. Again I told him just to turn it in. He pleaded for more time, and finally I sent him on his way with a stack of wrinkled and smudged papers, complimenting him on his determination and assuring him of my confidence in his ability to complete a great story.

I thought about him that summer, but the assignment left my mind until years later when I found his completed project in the mailbox. I was amazed and wondered what made Jimmy finish his story. What kind of vision, determination, and effort had been required in this task? Why do any of us finish a hard task, especially if no one demands its completion?

A pioneer who kept the faith

My husband's great-grandfather Henry Clegg Jr. was a finisher. He joined the Church with his family when the first LDS missionaries went to Preston, England. Henry had a view of his destination in his mind as he and his wife, Hannah, and their two young boys immigrated to Utah. Henry left his older parents, who were too feeble to make such a long and arduous journey, knowing he would never see them again.

While crossing the plains, Hannah contracted cholera and died. She was laid

to rest in an unmarked grave. The company then moved on, and at 6:00 in the evening, Henry's youngest son also died. Henry retraced his steps to Hannah's grave, placed his young son in his wife's arms, and reburied the two of them together. Henry then had to return to the wagon train, now five miles away. Suffering from cholera himself, Henry described his condition as being at death's door while realizing he still had 1,000 miles to walk. Amazingly he continued forward, putting one foot in front of the other. He stopped writing in his journal for several weeks after losing his dear Hannah and little son. I was struck with the words he used when he did start writing again: "Still moving."

When he finally reached the gathering place of the Saints, he began a new family. He kept the faith. He continued his story. Most remarkably, his heartache over the burial of his sweetheart and son gave birth to our family's legacy of moving forward, of finishing.

To stay faithful is its own reward

I have often wondered as I have heard pioneer stories like the one of Henry Clegg, "Could I ever do that?" Sometimes I fear this question, knowing our pioneer legacy lives on today. I recently visited West Africa and witnessed everyday pioneers walking forward, joining a new church, leaving behind centuries of traditions, even leaving behind family and friends, as did Henry. My admiration and love for them is as great as for my own forebears.

Do the challenges of others appear more difficult than our own? We often look at someone with tremendous responsibilities and think, "I could never do that." Yet others might look at us and feel exactly the same way. It is not the magnitude of the responsibility but rather how it feels to be the one in the middle of the unfinished task. For a young mother with many children at home, caring for them through

the day and then through the night could feel like 1,000 miles yet to walk. Giving a lesson in Relief Society to women who are older or younger, more experienced or more educated could feel difficult, especially when the topic is one you are struggling to understand and live yourself. Teaching a class of 10 active six-year-olds can be daunting, especially when your own six-year-old is in the class and you haven't quite figured out how to teach him one-on-one.

What do we learn from young Jimmy, from early pioneers, and from modern pioneers around the world that will help us in our specific challenges? Jimmy spent years writing on his own for no deadline, Henry Clegg marched on alone and without heart even to write in a journal, and African Saints lived worthy of a temple they could not have imagined would one day rise in their own nation. To keep going, to stay faithful, and to finish had to be its own reward.

Encouragement on the journey

Years ago one of our daughters asked me to come outside and play tetherball with her. She told me to sit down and watch as she hit over and over again a ball on a rope that wound itself around a pole. After watching several windings, I asked what my part was in the game, and she said, "Oh, Mom, you say, 'Good job, good job,' every time the ball goes around the pole."

"Good job!" helps the journey seem possible. It might sound like a phone call from a mother of one of the six-year-olds in that Primary class, calling to let the teacher know that her son carefully helped his little sister into the car seat without being asked, acknowledging the Primary teacher's lesson as the impetus for this new behavior. It might look like a husband getting the children off to nursery and Primary as his wife sets up her lesson for Young Women. It might be as simple as a

smile, a hug, or a long walk to sort things out with a friend, a husband, or a child.

We each must find and finish our own stories, but how much sweeter the telling when encouragement is called out, when arriving at our destination is valued and celebrated, however long ago the journey commenced.

Follow the Savior every day

The greatest mentor and advocate we have said: “I will go before your face. I will be on your right hand and on your left, and my Spirit shall be in your hearts, and mine angels round about you, to bear you up” (D&C 84:88). Can any of us afford to leave this piece out of our individual journey?

Henry Clegg was still moving forward to live among the faithful Saints, to take his place, to raise a righteous family, to serve his neighbor. He had that picture in his mind even when his heart was breaking. I heard a Primary child from Ghana answer the question “What does it mean to choose the right every day?” with, “It means to follow the Lord and Savior every day and do your best even when it is hard.” This modern pioneer boy knew President Hinckley’s admonition. He knew about keeping commandments every day. He understood that his own story would unfold simply by putting one foot in front of the other, one day at a time.

A Primary training video in Spanish

Last fall I found myself with a wonderful but challenging opportunity to develop and teach Primary training through a video made entirely in Spanish. At one time in my life I was a Spanish speaker, but recently I had been speaking Portuguese and knew what it would take to relearn Spanish. I did all the things each of you do to complete a task that feels extremely difficult. I found help from ca-

pable and dedicated Hispanic sisters. Together we studied, prayed, fasted, and worked long hours. The day arrived to go and do the thing the Lord had asked, and we not only were fearful but felt our work was inadequate. We had worked up to the moment of delivery, and nothing more could be done. I wanted to start over.

Each of our husbands gave us priesthood blessings, and peace and calm started to come. Like angels, help came in the form of a sweet husband who set the alarm on his watch so he could pray for me every half hour during the recording, a cameraman whose eyes radiated “Good job,” and Primary leaders who had confidence in the workings of the Spirit and were able to communicate that with power. We ended up with a finished film that was helpful for our Spanish-speaking leaders. All who participated in it were partly surprised and entirely grateful for its success. We walked as far as we could go, and when we thought we might abandon our carts and drop by the wayside, angels somehow pushed from behind.

Jesus wants us to finish our stories well

What did we learn from this task? The same lesson Henry Clegg Jr. and Jimmy learned and the same thing all faithful modern-day pioneers are learning. With the Lord, nothing is impossible (see Luke 1:37), but we each have to finish our own stories. He sends His Spirit, we call out encouragement to each other, but we have to keep writing, keep walking, keep serving and accepting new challenges to the end of our own stories. “Still walking” is the fundamental requirement in the journey of life. He wants us to finish well. He wants us to come back to Him. I pray that each of our stories will end in the presence of our Heavenly Father and His Son, our Savior Jesus Christ, the authors and finishers of our faith. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Elder Henry B. Eyring

In the strength of the Lord

When I was a young man, I served as counselor to a wise district president in the Church. He tried to teach me. One of the things I remember wondering about was this advice he gave: “When you meet someone, treat them as if they were in serious trouble, and you will be right more than half the time.”

I thought then that he was pessimistic. Now, more than 40 years later, I can see how well he understood the world and life. As time passes, the world grows more challenging, and our physical capacities slowly diminish with age. It is clear that we will need more than human strength. The Psalmist was right: “But the salvation of the righteous is of the Lord: he is their strength in the time of trouble.”¹

The restored gospel of Jesus Christ gives us help in knowing how to qualify for the strength of the Lord as we deal with adversity. It tells us why we face tests in life. And even more importantly, it tells us how to get protection and help from the Lord.

Why we face trials

We have trials to face because our Heavenly Father loves us. His purpose is to help us qualify for the blessing of living with Him and His Son, Jesus Christ, forever in glory and in families. To qualify for that gift, we had to receive a mortal body. With that mortality we understood that we would be tested by temptations and by difficulties.

The restored gospel not only teaches us why we must be tested, but it makes clear to us what the test is. The Prophet Joseph Smith gave us an explanation. By revelation he was able to record words spoken at the Creation of the world. They are about us, those of the spirit children

of our Heavenly Father who would come into mortality. Here are the words: “And we will prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them.”²

That explanation helps us understand why we face trials in life. They give us the opportunity to prove ourselves faithful to God. So many things beat upon us in a lifetime that simply enduring may seem almost beyond us. That’s what the words in the scripture “Ye must . . . endure to the end”³ seemed to mean to me when I first read them. It sounded grim, like sitting still and holding on to the arms of the chair while someone pulled out my tooth.

It can surely seem that way to a family depending on crops when there is no rain. They may wonder, “How long can we hold on?” It can seem that way to a youth who is faced with resisting the rising flood of filth and temptation. It can seem that way to a young man struggling to get the training he needs for a job to support a wife and family. It can seem that way to a person who can’t find a job or who has lost job after job as businesses close their doors. It can seem that way to a person faced with the erosion of health and physical strength which may come early or late in life for them or for those they love.

But the test a loving God has set before us is not to see if we can endure difficulty. It is to see if we can endure it well. We pass the test by showing that we remembered Him and the commandments He gave us. And to endure well is to keep those commandments whatever the opposition, whatever the temptation, and whatever the tumult around us. We have that clear understanding because the restored gospel makes the plan of happiness so plain.

That clarity lets us see what help we need. We need strength beyond ourselves

to keep the commandments in whatever circumstance life brings to us. For some it may be poverty, but for others it may be prosperity. It may be the ravages of age or the exuberance of youth. The combination of trials and their duration are as varied as are the children of our Heavenly Father. No two are alike. But what is being tested is the same at all times in our lives and for every person: will we do whatsoever the Lord our God will command us?

How to get help for trials

Knowing why we are tested and what the test tells us how to get help. We have to go to God. He gives us the commandments. And we will need more than our own strength to keep them.

Again, the restored gospel makes plain the simple things we need to do. And it gives us confidence that the help we need will come if we do those things early and persistently, long before the moment of crisis.

Prayer

The first, the middle, and the last thing to do is to pray. The Savior told us how. One of the clearest instructions is in 3 Nephi:

“Behold, verily, verily, I say unto you, ye must watch and pray always lest ye enter into temptation; for Satan desireth to have you, that he may sift you as wheat.

“Therefore ye must always pray unto the Father in my name;

“And whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, which is right, believing that ye shall receive, behold it shall be given unto you.

“Pray in your families unto the Father, always in my name, that your wives and your children may be blessed.”⁴

So, we must pray always.

Feast on the word

Another simple thing to do, which allows God to give us strength, is to feast on the word of God: read and ponder the standard works of the Church and the words of living prophets. There is a promise of help from God that comes with that daily practice. Faithful study of scriptures brings the Holy Ghost to us. The promise is given in the Book of Mormon, but it applies as well to all the words of God that He has given and will give us through His prophets.

“Behold, I would exhort you that when ye shall read these things, if it be wisdom in God that ye should read them, that ye would remember how merciful the Lord hath been unto the children of men, from the creation of Adam even down until the time that ye shall receive these things, and ponder it in your hearts.

“And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost.

“And by the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things.”⁵

We should claim the promise not only once nor only for the Book of Mormon. The promise is sure. The power of the Holy Ghost is real. It will come, again and again. And one overriding truth it will always testify to is that Jesus is the Christ.

That testimony will draw us to the Savior and to accepting the help He offers to all who are being tested in the crucible of mortality. More than once He has said that He would gather us to Him as a hen would gather her chickens under her wings. He says that we must choose to come to Him in meekness and with

enough faith in Him to repent “with full purpose of heart.”⁶

One way to do that is to gather with the Saints in His Church. Go to your meetings, even when it seems hard. If you are determined, He will help you find the strength to do it.

Strength from early-morning seminary

A member wrote to me from England. When her bishop asked if she would accept a call to teach early-morning seminary, he told her she’d better pray about it before she accepted. She did. She accepted. When she met the parents for the first time, the bishop stood beside her. She announced that she felt the program should go to five days a week. Some parents looked doubtful. One person said, “They won’t come. They’ll vote with their feet.”

Well, the doubt was half right. The students did vote with their feet. But their attendance in those cold and dark morning hours is now above 90 percent. That teacher and her bishop believed that if the students would start to come, they would be strengthened by power more than their own. It came. That power will protect them when they go to places where they will be the only Latter-day Saints. They will not be alone or without strength, because they accepted the invitation to gather with the Saints when it was not easy.

Help for a widow

That strength is given to those who are older as well as the young. I know a widow more than 90 years of age. She is in a wheelchair. She prays as you do, pleading for help to solve problems beyond her human power to resolve. The answer is a feeling in her heart. It draws her to keep a commandment: “And behold, ye shall meet together oft.”⁷ So she finds a way to

get to her meetings. People who attend there have told me, “We are so glad to see her. She brings such a spirit with her.”

She partakes of the sacrament, and she renews a covenant. She remembers the Savior, and she tries to keep His commandments. And so she takes His Spirit with her, always. Her problems may not be resolved. Most of them come from the choices of others, and even the Heavenly Father who hears her prayers and loves her cannot force others to choose the right. But He can send her to the safety of the Savior and the promise of His Spirit to be with her. And so I am sure that she will, in the strength of the Lord, pass the test she faces, because she keeps the commandment to gather often with the Saints. That is both the evidence that she is enduring well and the source of her strength for what lies ahead.

Responding to a call to serve

There is another simple thing to do. The Lord’s Church has been restored, and so any call to serve in it is a call to serve Him. That bishop in England was so wise. He asked the woman to pray about her call to serve. He knew what answer she would receive. It would be an invitation from the Father and His Beloved Son. He knew what she has learned by responding to the call from the Master. In His service the Holy Ghost comes as a companion to those who try to do the best they can. She must have felt that as she stood before the parents and when she saw the students vote with their feet. What looked hard, almost impossible under her own power, became a joy in the strength of the Lord.

When she reads and ponders over the scriptures and prays to prepare for those classes, she knows that the Savior has asked the Father to send her the Holy Ghost, just as He promised His disciples He would at the Last Supper, when He

knew what trials they would face and that He must leave them. He did not leave them comfortless. He promised them the Holy Ghost, and He promises it to us in His service. So whenever the invitation to serve comes, take it. It brings with it help to pass tests far beyond those of that call.

Now, not all have formal calls. But every disciple serves the Master by bearing testimony and being kind to people around them. All have promised in the waters of baptism to do that. And all will gain the companionship of the Spirit as they persist in keeping their commitments with God.

Blessings from service

In the Master's service, you will come to know and love Him. You will, if you persevere in prayer and faithful service, begin to sense that the Holy Ghost has become a companion. Many of us have for a period given such service and felt that companionship. If you think back on that time, you will remember that there were changes in you. The temptation to do evil seemed to lessen. The desire to do good increased. Those who knew you best and loved you may have said, "You have become more kind, more patient. You don't seem to be the same person."

You weren't the same person because the Atonement of Jesus Christ is real. And the promise is real that we can become new, changed, and better. And we can become stronger for the tests of life. We then go in the strength of the Lord, a strength developed in His service. He goes with us. And in time we become His tested and strengthened disciples.

You will then notice a change in your prayers. They will become more fervent and more frequent. The words you speak will have a different meaning to you. By commandment we always pray to the Father in the name of Jesus Christ. But you will feel a greater confidence as you pray to the Father, knowing that you go to Him

as a trusted and proven disciple of Jesus Christ. The Father will grant you greater peace and strength in this life and with it a happy anticipation of hearing the words, when the test of life is over, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant."⁸

I know that God the Father lives. I testify that He hears and answers our every prayer. I know that His Son, Jesus Christ, paid the price of all of our sins and that He wants us to come to Him. I know that the Father and the Son want us to pass the tests of life. I testify that They have prepared the way for us. Through the Restoration of the gospel in the last days, the way is made clear for us. We can know the commandments. We have the right to claim the promise of the companionship of the Holy Ghost in the true Church of Jesus Christ. And we can endure well. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Psalm 37:39.
2. Abraham 3:25.
3. 2 Nephi 31:20.
4. 3 Nephi 18:18–21.
5. Moroni 10:3–5.
6. 3 Nephi 10:6.
7. 3 Nephi 18:22.
8. Matthew 25:21.

The choir sang "We Are Sowing."

President Faust

We are grateful to the Tabernacle Choir for the beautiful music they have provided this morning. President Thomas S. Monson, First Counselor in the First Presidency, will be our concluding speaker at this session.

Following President Monson's remarks, the choir will sing "Come, Come, Ye Saints." The benediction will then be offered by Elder Wayne S. Peterson of the Seventy, and the conference will be adjourned until 2:00 this afternoon.

President Thomas S. Monson

Your personal influence

My dear brothers and sisters, both within my view and assembled throughout the world, I seek an interest in your prayers and your faith as I respond to the assignment and privilege to address you.

More than 40 years ago, when President David O. McKay extended to me a call to the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, he warmly welcomed me with a heartfelt smile and a tender embrace. Among the sacred counsel he extended was the declaration, “There is one responsibility that no one can evade. That is the effect of one’s personal influence.”

The calling of the early Apostles reflected the influence of the Lord. When He sought a man of faith, He did not select him from the throng of the self-righteous who were found regularly in the synagogue. Rather, He called him from among the fishermen of Capernaum. Peter, Andrew, James, and John heard the call, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.”¹ They followed. Simon, man of doubt, became Peter, Apostle of faith.

When the Savior was to choose a missionary of zeal and power, He found him not among His advocates but amidst His adversaries. Saul of Tarsus—the persecutor—became Paul the proselyter. The Redeemer chose imperfect men to teach the way to perfection. He did so then; He does so now.

He calls you and me to serve Him here below and sets us to the task He would have us fulfill. The commitment is total. There is no conflict of conscience.

As we follow that Man of Galilee—even the Lord Jesus Christ—our personal influence will be felt for good wherever we are, whatever our callings.

Our appointed task may appear insignificant, unnecessary, unnoticed. Some may be tempted to question:

“Father, where shall I work today?”
And my love flowed warm and free.
Then he pointed out a tiny spot
And said, “Tend that for me.”
I answered quickly, “Oh no, not that!
Why, no one would ever see,
No matter how well my work was done.
Not that little place for me.”
And the word he spoke, it was not
stern; . . .
“Art thou working for them or for me?
Nazareth was a little place,
And so was Galilee.”²

Service in the home

The family is the ideal place for teaching. It is also a laboratory for learning. Family home evening can bring spiritual growth to each member.

“The home is the basis of a righteous life, and no other instrumentality can take its place or fulfill its essential functions.”³ Such truth has been taught by many Presidents of the Church.

It is in the home where fathers and mothers can teach provident living to their children. Sharing of tasks and helping one another set a pattern for future families as children grow, marry, and leave home. The lessons learned in the home are those that last the longest. President Gordon B. Hinckley continues to stress the avoidance of unnecessary debt, the fallacy of living beyond our means, and the temptation to let our wants become our necessities.

The Apostle Paul’s exhortation to his beloved Timothy provides the counsel that will enable our personal influence to find lodgment in the hearts of those with whom

we associate: “Be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.”⁴

A dedicated Sunday School teacher

When I was a boy, our family lived in the Sixth-Seventh Ward of the Pioneer Stake. The ward population was rather transient, which resulted in an accelerated rate of turnover with respect to the teachers in the Sunday School. As boys and girls we would just become acquainted with a particular teacher and grow to appreciate him or her when the Sunday School superintendent would visit the class and introduce a new teacher. Disappointment filled each heart, and a breakdown of discipline resulted.

Prospective teachers, hearing of the unsavory reputation of our particular class, would graciously decline to serve or suggest the possibility of teaching a different class where the students were more manageable. We took delight in our newly found status and determined to live up to the fears of the faculty.

One Sunday morning a lovely young lady accompanied the superintendent into the classroom and was presented to us as a teacher who requested the opportunity to teach us. We learned that she had been a missionary and loved young people. Her name was Lucy Gertsch. She was beautiful, soft-spoken, and interested in us. She asked each class member to introduce himself, and then she asked questions which gave her an understanding and insight into the background of each. She told us of her girlhood in Midway, Utah, and as she described that beautiful valley she made its beauty live within us and we desired to visit the green fields she loved so much.

When Lucy taught, she made the scriptures actually live. We became personally acquainted with Samuel, David, Jacob, Nephi, Joseph Smith, and the Lord Jesus Christ. Our gospel scholarship grew.

Our deportment improved. Our love for Lucy Gertsch knew no bounds.

A lesson in sacrifice

We undertook a project to save nickels and dimes for what was to be a gigantic Christmas party. Sister Gertsch kept a careful record of our progress. As boys with typical appetites, we converted in our minds the monetary totals to cakes, cookies, pies, and ice cream. This was to be a glorious event. Never before had any of our teachers even suggested a social event like this was to be.

The summer months faded into autumn. Autumn turned to winter. Our party goal had been achieved. The class had grown. A good spirit prevailed.

None of us will forget that gray morning when our beloved teacher announced to us that the mother of one of our classmates had passed away. We thought of our own mothers and how much they meant to us. We felt sincere sorrow for Billy Devenport in his great loss.

The lesson this Sunday was from the book of Acts, chapter 20, verse 35: “Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.” At the conclusion of a well-prepared lesson, Lucy Gertsch commented on the economic situation of Billy’s family. These were Depression times, and money was scarce. With a twinkle in her eyes, she asked, “How would you like to follow this teaching of our Lord? How would you feel about taking our party fund and, as a class, giving it to the Devenports as an expression of our love?” The decision was unanimous. We counted so carefully each penny and placed the total sum in a large envelope. A beautiful card was purchased and inscribed with our names.

This simple act of kindness welded us together as one. We learned through our own experience that it is indeed more blessed to give than to receive.

The years have flown. The old chapel is gone, a victim of industrialization. The boys and girls who learned, who laughed, who grew under the direction of that inspired teacher of truth have never forgotten her love or her lessons. Her personal influence for good was contagious.

The influence of President Kimball

A General Authority whose personal influence was felt far and wide was the late President Spencer W. Kimball. He really made a difference in the lives of countless individuals.

When I was a bishop, the telephone rang one day, and the caller identified himself as Elder Spencer W. Kimball. He said, "Bishop Monson, in your ward is a trailer court, and in a little trailer in that court—the smallest trailer of all—is a sweet Navajo widow, Margaret Bird. Would you have your Relief Society president visit her and invite her to come to Relief Society and to participate with the sisters?" We did. Margaret Bird came and found a warm welcome.

Elder Kimball called on another occasion. "Bishop Monson," he said, "I have learned that there are two Samoan boys living in a downtown hotel. They're going to get in trouble. Will you make them members of your ward?"

I found these two boys at midnight sitting on the steps of the hotel playing ukuleles and singing. They became members of our ward. Eventually each of them married in the temple and served valiantly. Their influence for good was widespread.

The influence of two dedicated women

When I was first called as a bishop, I discovered that our record for subscriptions to the *Relief Society Magazine* in the Sixth-Seventh Ward had been at a low ebb. Prayerfully we analyzed the names of individuals whom we could call to be magazine representative. The inspiration

dictated that Elizabeth Keachie should be given the assignment. As her bishop, I approached her with the task. She responded, "Bishop Monson, I'll do it."

Elizabeth Keachie was of Scottish descent, and when she replied, "I'll do it," one knew she indeed would. She and her sister-in-law, Helen Ivory—neither more than five feet tall—commenced to walk the ward, house by house, street by street, and block by block. The result was phenomenal. We had more subscriptions to the *Relief Society Magazine* than had been recorded by all the other units of the stake combined.

Covering the final two blocks

I congratulated Elizabeth Keachie one Sunday evening and said to her, "Your task is done."

She replied, "Not yet, Bishop. There are two square blocks we have not yet covered."

When she told me which blocks they were, I said, "Oh, Sister Keachie, no one lives on those blocks. They are totally industrial."

"Just the same," she said, "I'll feel better if Nell and I go and check them ourselves."

On a rainy day she and Nell covered those final two blocks. On the first one she found no home, nor did she on the second. She and Sister Ivory paused, however, at a driveway which was muddy from a recent storm. Sister Keachie gazed about 100 feet down the driveway, which was adjacent to a machine shop, and there noticed a garage. This was not a normal garage, however, in that there was a curtain at the window.

She turned to her companion and said, "Nell, shall we go and investigate?"

The two sweet sisters then walked down the muddy driveway 40 feet to a point where the entire view of the garage could be seen. Now they noticed a door

which had been cut into the side of the garage, which door was unseen from the street. They also noticed that there was a chimney with smoke rising from it.

Elizabeth Keachie knocked at the door. A man 68 years of age, William Ringwood, answered. They then presented their story concerning the need of every home having the *Relief Society Magazine*. William Ringwood replied, "You'd better ask my father."

Ninety-four-year-old Charles W. Ringwood then came to the door and also listened to the message. He subscribed.

The fruits of their efforts

Elizabeth Keachie reported to me the presence of these two men in our ward. When I requested their membership certificates from Church headquarters, I received a call from the Membership Department at the Presiding Bishopric's Office. The clerk said, "Are you sure you have living in your ward Charles W. Ringwood?"

I replied that I did, whereupon she reported that the membership certificate for him had remained in the "lost and unknown" file of the Presiding Bishopric's Office for the previous 16 years.

On Sunday morning Elizabeth Keachie and Nell Ivory brought to our priesthood meeting Charles and William Ringwood. This was the first time they had been inside a chapel for many years. Charles Ringwood was the oldest deacon I had ever met. His son was the oldest male member holding no priesthood I had ever met.

It became my opportunity to ordain Brother Charles Ringwood a teacher and then a priest and finally an elder. I shall never forget his interview with respect to seeking a temple recommend. He handed me a silver dollar, which he took from an old, worn leather coin purse, and said, "This is my fast offering."

I said, "Brother Ringwood, you owe no fast offering. You need it yourself."

"I want to receive the blessings, not retain the money," he responded.

It was my opportunity to take Charles Ringwood to the Salt Lake Temple and to attend with him the endowment session.

Within a few months, Charles W. Ringwood passed away. At his funeral service I noticed his family sitting on the front rows in the mortuary chapel, but I noticed also two sweet women sitting near the rear of the chapel, Elizabeth Keachie and Helen Ivory.

As I gazed upon those two faithful and dedicated women and contemplated their personal influence for good, the promise of the Lord filled my very soul:

"I, the Lord, am merciful and gracious unto those who fear me, and delight to honor those who serve me in righteousness and in truth unto the end.

"Great shall be their reward and eternal shall be their glory."⁵

The influence of the Savior

There is one, above all others, whose personal influence covers the continents, spans the oceans, and penetrates the hearts of true believers. He atoned for the sins of mankind.

I testify that He is a teacher of truth—but He is more than a teacher. He is the Exemplar of the perfect life—but He is more than an exemplar. He is the Great Physician—but He is more than a physician. He is the literal Savior of the world, the Son of God, the Prince of Peace, the Holy One of Israel, even the risen Lord, who declared:

"I am Jesus Christ, whom the prophets testified shall come into the world. . . . I am the light and the life of the world."⁶

"I am the first and the last; I am he who liveth, I am he who was slain; I am your advocate with the Father."⁷

As His witness, I testify to you that He lives! In His holy name—even Jesus Christ, the Savior—amen.

NOTES

1. Matthew 4:19.
2. Meade MacGuire, "Father, Where Shall I Work Today?" in *Best-Loved Poems of the LDS People*, comp. Jack M. Lyon and others (1996), 152.
3. First Presidency letter, Feb. 11, 1999; quoted in *Ensign*, June 1999, 80.
4. 1 Timothy 4:12.
5. Doctrine and Covenants 76:5–6.
6. 3 Nephi 11:10–11.
7. Doctrine and Covenants 110:4.

The choir sang "Come, Come, Ye Saints."

Elder Wayne S. Peterson offered the benediction.

SATURDAY AFTERNOON SESSION

The second general session of the 174th Annual General Conference convened in the Conference Center on Saturday, April 3, 2004, at 2:00 p.m. President James E. Faust conducted this session.

Music for this session was provided by a Relief Society choir from stakes in Salt Lake. Vanja Watkins directed the choir, and Bonnie Goodliffe was the organist.

President Faust made the following remarks as the meeting began.

President James E. Faust

We welcome you this afternoon to the second general session of the 174th Annual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. President Gordon B. Hinckley, who presides at this conference, has asked that I, Brother Faust, conduct this session.

We extend our greetings to all who are in attendance or who are participating by means of television, radio, or the Internet and to the many who are watching in stake centers in various parts of the world where the conference is being carried by satellite transmission.

The music for this session will be by a Relief Society choir from stakes in Salt Lake, under the direction of Vanja Watkins, with Bonnie Goodliffe at the organ.

The choir will open these services by singing "Dearest Children, God Is Near You." The invocation will then be offered by Elder L. Whitney Clayton of the Seventy.

The choir sang "Dearest Children, God Is Near You."

Elder L. Whitney Clayton offered the invocation.

President Faust

The choir will now sing "The Lord Is My Shepherd." Following the singing, President Thomas S. Monson, First Counselor in the First Presidency, will present the General Authorities, Area Authority Seventies, and general auxiliary presidencies for your sustaining vote. Brother Wesley L. Jones, managing director of Church Auditing, will then read the Church Auditing Department Report. He will be followed by Brother F. Michael Watson, secretary to the First Presidency, who will present the statistical report of the Church for the year 2003.

The choir sang "The Lord Is My Shepherd."

The Sustaining of Church Officers

President Thomas S. Monson

My brothers and sisters, President Hinckley has requested that I now present to you the General Authorities, Area Authority Seventies, and general auxiliary presidencies of the Church for your sustaining vote.

It is proposed that we sustain Gordon Bitner Hinckley as prophet, seer, and revelator and President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; Thomas Spencer Monson as First Counselor in the First Presidency; and James Esdras Faust as Second Counselor in the First Presidency. Those in favor may manifest it. Those opposed, if any, by the same sign.

It is proposed that we sustain Thomas Spencer Monson as President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles; Boyd Kenneth Packer as Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles; and the following as members of that quorum: Boyd K. Packer, L. Tom Perry, David B. Haight, Neal A. Maxwell, Russell M. Nelson, Dallin H. Oaks, M. Russell Ballard, Joseph B. Wirthlin, Richard G. Scott, Robert D. Hales, Jeffrey R. Holland, and Henry B. Eyring. Those in favor may please manifest it. Any opposed.

It is proposed that we sustain the counselors in the First Presidency and the Twelve Apostles as prophets, seers, and revelators. All in favor, please manifest it. Contrary, if there be any, by the same sign.

It is proposed that we release with a vote of thanks Elder Dennis B. Neuenchwander as a member of the Presidency of the Quorums of the Seventy. All who wish to join with us in doing so, please manifest it.

It is proposed that we release the following as Area Authority Seventies:

Adolfo Ávalos, Lowell C. Barber, David J. Barnett, R. Michael Duffin, Rowland E. Elvidge, Silvio Geschwandtner, Brent H. Koyle, A. Roger Merrill, J. Michael Moeller, Adrian Ochoa, Lindon J.

Robison. All who wish to join in expressing appreciation, please manifest it.

It is proposed that we release with a vote of thanks as the Sunday School general presidency Elders Merrill J. Bateman, John H. Groberg, and Val R. Christensen; and as the Young Men general presidency Elders F. Melvin Hammond, Lynn G. Robbins, and Donald L. Hallstrom. All who can join in a vote of appreciation, please manifest it.

It is proposed that we sustain Elder John H. Groberg as a member of the Presidency of the Quorums of the Seventy. All in favor, please manifest it. Any opposed.

It is proposed that we sustain the following as Area Authority Seventies:

Jorge M. Alvarado, Homero S. Amato, John S. Anderson, Jorge D. Arrevilaga, A. Venâncio Caleira, Gabriel A. Campos, Mario L. Carlos, John J. Chipman, LeGrand R. Curtis Jr., César A. Dávila, Mosiah S. Delgado, Keith R. Edwards, J. Roger Fluhman, Luiz C. França, Manuel Gonzalez, Tohru Hotta, Bin Kikuchi, Yong Hwan Lee, Alfredo Heliton de Lemos, Domingos S. Linhares, Alexander A. Nuñez, Melvin R. Perkins, James C. Perry, Errol S. Phippen, John C. Pingree, Neil E. Pitts, Dinar M. Reyes, Jorge A. Rojas, Eric B. Shumway, Joseph W. Sitati, Terrence C. Smith, Lowell M. Snow, Michael J. Teh, Stanley Wan, and Allen P. Young. All in favor, please manifest it. Any opposed, by the same sign.

With a recent decision that members of the Quorums of the Seventy not serve in the general presidencies of the Sunday School and Young Men, it is proposed that we sustain A. Roger Merrill as general president of the Sunday School, with Daniel K. Judd as first counselor and William D. Oswald as second counselor.

It is also proposed that we sustain Charles W. Dahlquist as general president of the Young Men, with Dean Reid Burgess as first counselor and Michael An-

tone Neider as second counselor. All in favor, please manifest it. Any opposed.

It is proposed that we sustain the other General Authorities, Area Authority Seventies, and general auxiliary presidencies as presently constituted. Those in favor may please manifest it. Any opposed may manifest it.

It appears that the sustaining has been unanimous in the affirmative.

Thank you, brothers and sisters, for your continued faith and prayers.

We now ask the newly called members of the Sunday School and Young Men general presidencies to take their places on the stand. We note, however, that William D. Oswald is currently serving as president of the Russia Vladivostok Mission and is therefore not in attendance.

Church Auditing Department Report for 2003

Wesley L. Jones

To the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Dear Brethren: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints maintains an auditing department, which performs its work independently from all other Church departments and operations. The managing director of the Church Auditing Department reports directly and regularly to the First Presidency. Church Auditing Department staff consist of certified public accountants, certified internal auditors, certified information systems auditors, and other credentialed professionals.

By charge from the First Presidency, the Church Auditing Department has authority to audit all Church departments and operations worldwide. The Church Auditing Department has access to all systems, records, personnel, and properties necessary to audit contributions, expenditures, and Church resources. Professional financial and operational auditing standards govern the performance of audit work. Risk is the primary factor guiding the selection of audits.

The Council on the Disposition of the Tithes is responsible for, and for the year 2003 authorized, the expenditure of Church funds. This council is composed of the First Presidency, the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, and the Presiding Bishopric, as prescribed by revelation. Under direction of this council, accountability for

contributions, expenditures, and Church resources is controlled through each department's management and through the Church's Budget and Finance Departments. Administration of funds by these management, budget, and finance groups is audited and reported.

Based upon our audits, the Church Auditing Department is of the opinion that, in all material respects, contributions received, expenditures made, and Church resources used during the year 2003 have been administered in accordance with approved budget guidelines and established Church policies and procedures.

Financial activities of Church-affiliated organizations, which are operated separately from the Church, were not audited by the Church Auditing Department in 2003. Independent public accounting firms audited the financial statements and corresponding controls in these organizations. These organizations include, among others, Deseret Management Corporation and its subsidiaries and the Church's institutions of higher education, including Brigham Young University. Nevertheless, the Church Auditing Department did verify that appropriate reporting of these public accounting firms' audit results occurred with each organization's audit committee.

Respectfully submitted,
Church Auditing Department
Wesley L. Jones
Managing Director

Church Statistical Report for 2003

F. Michael Watson

For the information of the members of the Church, the First Presidency has issued the following report concerning the growth and status of the Church as of December 31, 2003:

Number of Church units

Stakes	2,624
Districts	644
Missions	337
Wards and branches	26,237

Church membership

Total membership	11,985,254
Increase in children of record during 2003	99,457
Converts baptized during 2003 ..	242,923

Missionaries

Full-time missionaries	56,237
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Temples

Temples dedicated during 2003	2
(Brisbane Australia, Redlands California)	
Temples in operation	116

Prominent members who have passed away since last April

Elder Jacob de Jager, an emeritus General Authority; *Elder Andrew Wayne Peterson*, an emeritus General Authority; *Elder Robert L. Simpson*, an emeritus General Authority; *Sister Elaine Cannon*, former Young Women general president; *Brother Roy M. Darley*, former Tabernacle organist.

President Faust

We will now be pleased to hear from Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. He will be followed by Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, also of the Quorum of the Twelve.

Elder Russell M. Nelson

Roots and branches

Each time we experience security checks at an airport, we are asked to show photographic identification. We understand the need and comply, knowing that it is necessary and helpful. But I submit my photograph as evidence of my true identity somewhat apologetically. If someone were to examine my passport photo and say that it's a good likeness, I would know it's time to go home. But I feel apologetic for another reason. The photo shows nothing about my roots and branches. They are important parts of my identity. Could you tell much about a tree by looking at a photograph of only its trunk? No! Roots and branches of trees provide much more in-

formation. So it is with us both *personally* and with *our religion*.

Personal roots

Personal roots are really important. Sister Nelson and I know a family that proudly display evidence of their ancestral roots with large paintings portrayed on the *outside* walls of their home. Beautiful artwork there depicts distinctive patterns of identity for both of their family lines.

When relatives gather around a new baby, one inevitably hears comments such as "She has red hair, just like her mother" or "He has a dimple in his chin, just like his father."

Each of us has ancestral roots. Each man has received some genetic markers that are just like those of his father. Each woman has received some genetic markers that are just like those of her mother.¹ In addition, each of us has received other genetic gifts that make us unique.

Because we have a spirit as well as a physical body,² we also have spiritual roots that go way back. They shape our values, our beliefs, and our faith. Spiritual roots guide our commitment to the ideals and teachings of the Lord.³

Children have a natural desire to emulate the examples of their parents. Generally, boys incline toward the attitudes and work of their fathers; girls aspire to live as their mothers do. And you parents, don't be too surprised if, sometime along the way, your children become better than you.

Personal roots, physical and spiritual, merit gratitude. For my life, I am grateful to my Creator as well as to my dear parents and progenitors. I try to honor them by learning of them and serving them in the temple.⁴ Parents have a responsibility to share knowledge of their personal roots with their children and grandchildren. Learning their history together unifies a family.

Religious roots

We also need to know the roots of our religion. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, though officially organized in 1830, has been restored from roots that also go way back. Truths from previous dispensations have now been gathered, amplified, and clarified.⁵ For us as parents and teachers, we have an excellent teaching resource in the Articles of Faith. Written by the Prophet Joseph Smith,⁶ this document refers to many doctrines that undergird our religion. It mentions the Godhead, moral agency, the Fall of Adam, and the Atonement of Jesus Christ. It spells out the foundational prin-

ciples and ordinances of faith, repentance, baptism, and the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost. It addresses matters of priesthood authority and organization. It notes as sacred scripture the Holy Bible, the Book of Mormon, and an open canon of continuing revelation from God. And it proclaims the actuality of the gathering of Israel.⁷ What a treasure-house of truth is this precious document as we teach of our religious roots.

Other revealed doctrines at the root of our religion include the Creation, the Resurrection, the law of tithing, prayer, and the consummate blessings of the temple. As we teach of these doctrines, we realize how very firm is our foundation. As we apply these doctrines in our lives, the roots of our religion become part of our own spiritual strength.

Converts need to strengthen their religious roots. President Gordon B. Hinckley has taught that each convert needs a friend, a responsibility, and nurturing by the good word of God. With such roots to support them and their children, precious converts become pioneers for their own families to follow.

Unfortunately some members of faithful families drift away because their own roots are weak. My heart aches when I learn of those who turn from the faith of their pioneer predecessors. One professionally acclaimed friend and gifted son of faithful ancestors has allowed one doctrinal doubt to dim his view of the fulness of the gospel and drive an ever-widening wedge between him and the temple. Another acquaintance, a sweet sister with illustrious pioneer progenitors, now politely states that she is not a "practicing member" of the Church.

Have these dear people become so fashionable that they have forgotten their roots? Have they forgotten what the Restoration really means and what it cost? Have they forgotten their pioneer heritage and their lineage as declared in patriarchal

blessings? For a few fleeting favors now, would they forget and forfeit eternal life? Oblivious to the roots that have blessed them, they no longer enjoy the spiritual sparkle of Saints engaged in the work of Almighty God.

Their noble ancestors “were brought to the knowledge of the truth . . . according to the spirit of revelation and of prophecy, and the power of God.” Their forebears “were converted unto the Lord [and] never did fall away.”⁸ How will those progenitors feel about the drift of their descendants? Their disappointment will likely turn to sorrow, for fruit detached from roots cannot long survive.

The Lord issued this solemn warning: “After ye have been nourished by the good word of God . . . , will ye reject these words . . . of the prophets; and will ye reject all the words which have been spoken concerning Christ, . . . and the power of God, and the gift of the Holy Ghost, . . . and make a mock of the great plan of redemption, which [has] been laid for you?

“ . . . The resurrection . . . will bring you to stand with shame and awful guilt before the bar of God.”⁹

I plead with each of us to heed that sacred warning.

Personal branches

Just as our roots determine to a significant degree who we are, our branches are also an important extension of our identity. Personal branches bear the fruit of our loins.¹⁰ Scriptures teach, “By their fruits ye shall know them.”¹¹ Earlier in life, Sister Nelson and I often met young people who said they felt like they knew us because they knew our children. Now we are greeted fondly by those who know us because they know our grandchildren.

Religious branches

In much the same way, our religion is known by the fruit of its branches. Re-

cently I met with some government officials from a land far from here who were deeply impressed with the Church and its efforts throughout the world. They liked our teachings about the family and wanted copies of our proclamation to the world and guidebooks for family home evening. They wanted to know more about our welfare program and humanitarian help. We complied as we could and then shifted attention from *what* we do to *why* we do it. I explained with an analogy to a tree. “You are attracted by various fruits of our faith,” I said. “They are plentiful and powerful. But you cannot savor this fruit unless you know the tree that produces it. And you cannot understand the tree unless you comprehend its roots. With our religion, you cannot have the fruits without the roots.” This they understood.

Fruits from the branching tree of the gospel include “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, [and] faith.”¹² President Harold B. Lee once said: “Beautiful, luscious fruit does not grow unless the roots of the . . . tree have been planted in rich, fertile soil and unless due care is given to proper pruning, cultivation, and irrigation. So likewise the luscious fruits of virtue and chastity, honesty, temperance, integrity, and fidelity are not to be found growing in that individual whose life is not founded on a firm testimony of the truths of the gospel and of the life and the mission of the Lord Jesus Christ.”¹³

The fruits of the gospel are delicious to those who obey the Lord. We pursue an education knowing that “the glory of God is intelligence.”¹⁴ The blessing of tithing comes by paying tithing.¹⁵ Rewards are reaped from the Word of Wisdom by obedience to it.¹⁶ We learn from experience borne of gospel living that prayer, honoring the Sabbath day, and partaking of the sacrament protect us from the bondage of sin. We shun pornography and immorality, knowing that the peace of personal purity

can be ours only as we live according to the laws of the gospel.

The Lord gave this promise and commandment: “Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in me, and I in you. . . . I am the vine, ye are the branches.”¹⁷ Simply summarized, life’s greatest blessings will come to us if our love of Jesus Christ is rooted deeply in our hearts.¹⁸

Divinity is rooted in each of us

Personal identity is much more than a passport photograph. We also have roots and branches. Divinity is rooted in each of us. “We all are the work of [our Creator’s] hand.”¹⁹ We are eternal beings. In premortal realms, we brethren were foreordained for our priesthood responsibilities.²⁰ Before the foundation of the world, women were prepared that they may bear children and glorify God.²¹

We came to this mortal experience to acquire a body, to be tried and tested.²² We are to form families and be sealed in holy temples, with joy and loving relationships that endure eternally. To these everlasting truths we are personally rooted.

Branches of our families and of the gospel bear fruit to enrich our lives. God’s work and His glory—“to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man”—can become ours.²³ We can dwell with Him and with our families forever. Those blessings will be granted to the faithful in His own way and time.²⁴

God lives. Jesus is the Christ. Joseph Smith is the revelator and prophet of this last dispensation. The Book of Mormon is true. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the Lord’s kingdom established once again upon the earth. President Gordon B. Hinckley is His living prophet. If rooted to these truths, the fruit of our branches will remain.²⁵ I so testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. In addition to the genetic information each child receives from his or her mother and father, a small set of mitochondrial DNA comes from the mother to both her son(s) and her daughter(s).
2. See Doctrine and Covenants 88:15.
3. See Ephesians 3:14–19; Colossians 2:6–7.
4. See Doctrine and Covenants 128:15.
5. See Doctrine and Covenants 128:18.
6. The Articles of Faith were included in a letter to Mr. John Wentworth, editor and proprietor of a Chicago newspaper; first published in the *Times and Seasons*, Mar. 1, 1842; see *Ensign*, July 2002, 26–32.
7. This document also mentions gifts of the Spirit that enlighten the lives of members of the Church. It foretells of great events of the latter days, such as the restoration of the ten tribes, the establishment of Zion, and the millennial reign of Jesus Christ upon a renewed earth. It includes principles of freedom of worship, tolerance, and obedience to law. And it concludes with an expression pertaining to our perception of life and of lofty personal ideals.
8. Alma 23:6.
9. Jacob 6:7–9.
10. See, for example, 2 Nephi 3:6–7.
11. Matthew 7:20; 3 Nephi 14:20; see also Joseph Smith Translation, Matthew 7:25.
12. Galatians 5:22.
13. *Stand Ye in Holy Places* (1974), 218–19.
14. Doctrine and Covenants 93:36.
15. See Malachi 3:10; 3 Nephi 24:10.
16. See Doctrine and Covenants 89:18–21.
17. John 15:3–5.
18. See Ephesians 3:17.
19. Isaiah 64:8.
20. See Alma 13:1–5.
21. See Doctrine and Covenants 132:63.
22. “Even as Abraham” (D&C 101:4). See also Hebrews 11:17.
23. Moses 1:39.
24. See Doctrine and Covenants 88:68. When any blessing is obtained from God, “it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated” (D&C 130:21).
25. See John 15:16.

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland

Dedicated servants of the Lord

In earlier years the Brethren often reported their missions in general conference. I realize this is 2004, not 1904, but I wish to invoke the spirit of that earlier practice and reflect on some of the wonderful things Sister Holland and I are experiencing in Latin America. In doing so I hope to make general application to all of you, wherever you may live or serve.

First of all I would like to thank every missionary who has ever labored in this transcendent latter-day undertaking we have been given. The rolling forth of the restored gospel is a miracle in every sense of the word, and not the least of the miracle is that a significant portion of it rolls forward on the shoulders of 19-year-olds! As we have seen your sons and daughters, grandsons and granddaughters (and in some cases your parents and grandparents!) faithfully laboring in Chile, I have pictured the tens of thousands of others like them we have met all over the world. Clean, clear, bright-eyed missionaries, laboring two-by-two, have become a living symbol of this Church everywhere. They themselves are the first gospel message their investigators encounter—and what a message that is. Everyone knows who they are, and those of us who know them the best love them the most.

Sacrifices of missionaries

I wish you could meet the sister called to serve with us from her native Argentina. Wanting to do everything possible to finance her own mission, she sold her violin, her most prized and nearly sole earthly possession. She said simply, “God will bless me with another violin after I have blessed His children with the gospel of Jesus Christ.”

I wish you could meet the Chilean elder who, living without family in a boarding school, happened upon a Book of Mormon

and started reading it that very evening. Reminiscent of Parley P. Pratt’s experience, he read insatiably—nonstop through the night. With the breaking of day, he was overwhelmed with a profound sense of peace and a new spirit of hope. He determined to find out where this book had come from and who had written its marvelous pages. Thirteen months later he was on a mission.

I wish you could meet the marvelous young man who came to us from Bolivia, arriving with no matching clothing and shoes three sizes too large for him. He was a little older because he was the sole breadwinner in his home, and it had taken some time to earn money for his mission. He raised chickens and sold the eggs door-to-door. Then, just as his call finally came, his widowed mother faced an emergency appendectomy. Our young friend gave every cent of the money he had earned for his mission to pay for his mother’s surgery and postoperative care, then quietly rounded up what used clothing he could from his friends and arrived at the MTC in Santiago on schedule. I can assure you that his clothes now match, his shoes now fit, and both he and his mother are safe and sound, temporally as well as spiritually.

And so they come, from your homes all over the world. Included in such a long list of dedicated servants of the Lord is an increasing number of senior couples who make an indispensable contribution to the work. How we love and need couples in virtually every mission of this Church! Those of you who can, put away your golf clubs, don’t worry about the stock market, realize that your grandchildren will still be your grandchildren when you return—and go! We promise you the experience of a lifetime.

Faithfulness of Church members

Let me say something of the marvelous members of the Church themselves. In the

reorganization of a rather far-flung stake recently, I felt the Lord's prompting to call a man to the stake presidency who, I had been told, owned a bicycle but no automobile. Many leaders across the Church don't have cars, but I was nevertheless worried about what that might mean for this man in this particular stake. In my terminally ill Spanish I pursued the interview, then said, "*Hermano, ¿no tiene un auto?*" With a smile and not a second's hesitation he replied, "*No tengo un auto; pero yo tengo pies, yo tengo fe.*" ("I do not have a car, but I do have feet and I do have faith.") He then said he could ride the bus, ride his bicycle, or walk, "*como los misioneros,*" he smiled—"like the missionaries." And so he does.

Just eight weeks ago I was holding a mission district conference on the island of Chiloé, an interior location in the south of Chile that gets few visitors. Imagine the responsibility I felt in addressing these beautiful people when it was pointed out to me that a very elderly man seated near the front of the chapel had set out on foot at five o'clock that morning, walking for four hours to be in his seat by nine o'clock for a meeting that was not scheduled to begin until eleven o'clock. He said he wanted to get a good seat. I looked into his eyes, thought of times in my life when I had been either too casual or too late, and thought of Jesus's phrase, "I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel."¹

Sacrifices to go to the temple

The Punta Arenas Chile Stake is the Church's southernmost stake anywhere on this planet, its outermost borders stretching toward Antarctica. Any stake farther south would have to be staffed by penguins. For the Punta Arenas Saints it is a 4,200-mile round-trip bus ride to the Santiago temple. For a husband and wife it can take up to 20 percent of an annual local income just for the transportation alone. Only 50 people can be accommodated on the bus, but for every excursion

250 others come out to hold a brief service with them the morning of their departure.

Pause for a minute and ask yourself when was the last time you stood on a cold, windswept parking lot adjacent to the Strait of Magellan just to sing with, pray for, and cheer on their way those who were going to the temple, hoping your savings would allow you to go next time? One hundred ten hours, 70 of those on dusty, bumpy, unfinished roads looping through Argentina's wild Patagonia. What does 110 hours on a bus feel like? I honestly don't know, but I do know that some of us get nervous if we live more than 110 miles from a temple or if the services there take more than 110 minutes. While we are teaching the principle of tithing to, praying with, and building ever more temples for just such distant Latter-day Saints, perhaps the rest of us can do more to enjoy the blessings and wonder of the temple regularly when so many temples are increasingly within our reach.

"Abide in me"

And that leads me to my final point. For the Church at large, we have so many things to associate in our minds with the visionary ministry of President Gordon B. Hinckley, including (perhaps especially) the vast expansion of temples and temple building. But I dare say for those of us on this rostrum, it is likely that we will remember him at least as emphatically for his determination to retain in permanent activity the converts who join this Church. No modern prophet has addressed this issue more directly nor expected more from us in seeing that it happen. With a twinkle in his eye and a hand smacking the table in front of him, he said to the Twelve recently, "Brethren, when my life is finished and the final services are concluding, I am going to rise up as I go by, look each of you in the eye, and say, 'How are we doing on retention?'"

This subject brings us full circle, linking the kind of true, deep conversion the missionaries are striving to bring with the greater commitment and devotion being seen in wonderful members all over the Church.

Christ said, “I am the true vine, and . . . ye are the branches.”² “Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.”³

“Abide in me” is an understandable and beautiful enough concept in the elegant English of the King James Bible, but *abide* is not a word we use much anymore. So I gained even more appreciation for this admonition from the Lord when I was introduced to the translation of this passage in another language. In Spanish that familiar phrase is rendered *permaneced en mi*. Like the English verb *abide*, *permanecer* means “to remain, to stay,” but even gringos like me can hear the root cognate there of “permanence.” The sense of this, then, is “stay—but stay forever.” That is the call of the gospel message to Chileans and everyone else in the world. Come, but come to remain. Come with conviction and endurance. Come permanently, for your sake and the sake of all the generations who must follow you, and we will help each other be strong to the very end.

Stay aboard the Good Ship Zion

“He who picks up one end of the stick picks up the other,” my marvelous mission president taught in his very first message to us.⁴ And that is the way it is supposed to be when we join this, the true and living Church of the true and living God. When we join The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, we board the Good Ship Zion and sail with her wherever she goes until she comes into that millennial port. *We stay in the boat*, through squalls and stills, through storms and sunburn, because that is the only way to the promised

land. This Church is the Lord’s vehicle for crucial doctrines, ordinances, covenants, and keys that are essential to exaltation, and one cannot be fully faithful to the gospel of Jesus Christ without striving to be faithful in the Church, which is its earthly institutional manifestation. To new convert and longtime member alike, we declare in the spirit of Nephi’s powerful valedictory exhortation:

“Ye have entered in by the gate; . . . [but] now, . . . after ye have gotten into this strait and narrow path, I would ask if all is done? Behold, I say unto you, Nay; . . . press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, . . . and endure to the end, behold, thus . . . ye shall have eternal life.”⁵

Jesus said, “Without me ye can do nothing.”⁶ I testify that that is God’s truth. Christ is everything to us, and we are to “abide” in Him permanently, unyieldingly, steadfastly, forever. For the fruit of the gospel to blossom and bless our lives, we must be firmly attached to Him, the Savior of us all, and to this, His Church, which bears His holy name. He is the vine that is our true source of strength and the only source of eternal life. In Him we not only will endure but also will prevail and triumph in this holy cause that will never fail us. May we never fail it nor fail Him, I pray in the sacred and holy name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Matthew 8:10.
2. John 15:1, 5.
3. John 15:4.
4. Marion D. Hanks quoting Harry Emerson Fosdick, *Living under Tension* (1941), 111.
5. 2 Nephi 31:18–20.
6. John 15:5.

President Faust

The choir and congregation will now sing “Let Us All Press On.” Bishop Keith B. McMullin of the Presiding Bishopric

will then address us, after which we shall hear from Elders W. Rolfe Kerr and Francisco J. Viñas of the Seventy.

The choir and congregation sang
“Let Us All Press On.”

Bishop Keith B. McMullin

“Jesus, the very thought of thee”

Recently President Hinckley was overheard saying to a young couple newly married in the temple, “What a wonderful time to be alive and to be in love.” His optimistic outlook and nature are reassuring. They foster hope in an otherwise gloomy world. These are, however, more than mere expressions of a positive personality. A glimpse into the past will help illustrate what I mean.

In the early 12th century, the cleric Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, “a man of intense . . . faith,”¹ penned the following words:

Jesus, the very thought of thee
With sweetness fills my breast;
But sweeter far thy face to see
And in thy presence rest.²

These lines speak of hope and joy and peace, though written in a time when much of the world lay blanketed in ignorance, impoverishment, and despair. These words capture the calm assurance that always accompanies the testimony of Jesus. This same assurance gives buoyancy and optimism to our beloved prophet and to all the faithful followers of Christ.

What, then, is this testimony of Jesus, how can it be acquired, and what will it do for those who receive it? The testimony of Jesus is the sure and certain knowledge, revealed to the spirit of a person through the Holy Ghost, that Jesus is the living Son of the living God.³

Because the testimony of Jesus is God-given, it stands preeminent and is essential to a happy life. It is the fundamental prin-

ciple of our religion, and all other things pertaining to our faith are appendages to it.⁴ President Hinckley reminds us:

“It is the privilege, it is the opportunity, it is the obligation of every Latter-day Saint to gain for himself or herself a certain knowledge . . . that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, the Redeemer of all mankind. . . . That testimony . . . is the most precious possession that any of us can hold. . . .

“ . . . I am satisfied . . . that whenever a man has a true witness in his heart of the living reality of the Lord Jesus Christ all else will come together as it should.”⁵

Nurtured through righteous living, this testimony of Jesus becomes the governing force in all that a person does. Furthermore, it is available to everyone, for “God is no respecter of persons.”⁶

Acquiring a testimony

Acquiring such a testimony does not, however, come without personal effort. One must *desire to know, study to learn, live to merit, and pray to receive*. When so pursued in humility and faith, the knowledge comes, and with this knowledge comes both the sweet assurance that all will be well and the inner strength to make it so.

Desire to know

The *desire to know* is the first step in one’s quest for a testimony of Jesus. The scriptures counsel, “If ye will awake and arouse your faculties, even to an experiment upon my words, and exercise a particle of faith, yea, even if ye can no more

than desire to believe, let this desire work in you, even until ye believe in a manner that ye can give place for a portion of my words.”⁷

Study to learn

A testimony of Jesus requires that the honest seeker *study to learn*. Said the Lord, “Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.”⁸

From cover to cover, the Holy Bible teaches and testifies of Christ. He is Jehovah of the Old Testament, Messiah of the New.⁹ The Book of Mormon, another testament of Him, was compiled, preserved, and brought forth for the express purpose of “convincing . . . Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God, manifesting himself unto all nations.”¹⁰

Live to merit

Concurrent with one’s *desire* and *study*, one must *live to merit* such a testimony. The person who does what Jesus says comes to know who Jesus is. Said He:

“My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me.

“If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.”¹¹

Pray to receive

Finally, the testimony of Jesus comes to those who *pray to receive* it. “Ask, and it shall be given you”¹² is the invitation that leads those who are humble and penitent to such knowledge. With this knowledge, the seeker also gains an understanding of the origin and purposes of life, opening vistas that would otherwise remain hidden.

For example, the Lord’s life did not begin in Bethlehem,¹³ and ours did not begin at birth. In the premortal world, He stood as the stalwart, unwavering advocate of God’s eternal plan for His children,¹⁴ and we were there. In the great War in

Heaven, it was by the power of the First-born that Lucifer was cast out,¹⁵ and we helped champion the cause. Through God’s Only Begotten Son “the worlds are and were created,”¹⁶ and we can therefore achieve our divine potential. As President J. Reuben Clark has said:

“It was not a novice, not an amateur, not a Being making a first trial, that came down in the beginning . . . and . . . made this world. . . .

“And if you think of this galaxy of ours having within it from the beginning perhaps . . . one million worlds, and multiply that by the number of millions of galaxies . . . that surround us, you will then get some view of who [Jesus Christ] is.”¹⁷

The divine mission of Jesus Christ

In awe, we exult with the ancient cleric: Jesus, the very thought of Thee with wonder fills my breast.

As the literal offspring of God and being born of a mortal mother, the premortal Christ became the Only Begotten of the Father in the flesh. Though the fulness of His majesty, messiahship, and godhood came not at first, He “continued from grace to grace, until he received a fulness,” and so can we.¹⁸

Angels attended Him, the Holy Ghost descended upon Him, the woes of all mankind were carried by Him, and our sins can be forgiven through Him.¹⁹

This Jesus, who is called Christ, wrought out a perfect atonement for all mankind by His incomparable life, His suffering in Gethsemane, the shedding of His blood, His death upon the cross, and His glorious Resurrection. He conquered the grave, and because of Him, so will we.²⁰ “He is the greatest Being to be born on this earth. . . . He is Lord of lords, King of kings, . . . the Savior, . . . the Bright and Morning Star. . . . His name . . . is the only name under heaven [whereby] we can be saved.”²¹ He is the Anointed One. Again

we exclaim: Jesus, the very thought of Thee with *reverence* fills my breast.

As the world could not overcome Him in the meridian of time, so the world cannot do without Him in our time, and neither can we. His purpose is “to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man.”²² Hence, He came to the Prophet Joseph Smith, restored the priesthood, reestablished His Church, and again proclaimed the plan of redemption. Joseph saw Him, conversed with Him, and has left us this transcendent, poetic account of Him:

I beheld round the throne holy angels
and hosts,
And sanctified beings from worlds that
have been,
In holiness worshipping God and the
Lamb,
For ever and ever. Amen and amen.

And now after all of the proofs made
of him,
By witnesses truly, by whom he was
known,
This is mine, last of all, that he lives;
yea, he lives!
And sits at the right hand of God on
his throne.

And I heard a great voice bearing
record from heav’n,
He’s the Saviour and only begotten
of God;
By him, of him, and through him, the
worlds were all made,
Even all that [careen] in the heavens
so broad.

Whose inhabitants, too, from the first
to the last,
Are sav’d by the very same Saviour of
ours;
And, of course, are begotten God’s
daughters and sons
By the very same truths and the very
same powers.²³

Witnesses of Christ

We have with us today the Lord’s duly ordained Apostles. True to their sacred commission as “special witnesses of the name of Christ in all the world,”²⁴ they declare:

“Jesus is the Living Christ, the immortal Son of God. He is the great King Immanuel, who stands today on the right hand of His Father. He is the light, the life, and the hope of the world. His way is the path that leads to happiness in this life and eternal life in the world to come. God be thanked for the matchless gift of His divine Son.”²⁵

Jesus, the very thought of Thee fills my heart with *inexpressible joy*. It controls every part of my being. My life, my loves, my ambitions are molded, enlivened, and given purpose because I know that Thou art the Christ, the Holy One.

I thank God for my testimony of Jesus and pray that all may be likewise blessed, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Karen Lynn Davidson, *Our Latter-day Hymns: The Stories and the Messages* (1988), 167.
2. “Jesus, the Very Thought of Thee,” *Hymns*, no. 141.
3. See Job 32:8; 1 Corinthians 2:11.
4. See *History of the Church*, 3:30.
5. *Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley* (1997), 647–48.
6. Acts 10:34; see also Doctrine and Covenants 1:35; 38:16.
7. Alma 32:27; italics added.
8. John 5:39.
9. See “The Living Christ: The Testimony of the Apostles,” *Ensign*, Apr. 2000, 2.
10. Book of Mormon title page.
11. John 7:16–17.
12. See Matthew 7:7–8; Doctrine and Covenants 4:7.
13. See “The Living Christ: The Testimony of the Apostles”; see also Moses 2:26.
14. See Abraham 3:22–27.

15. See Moses 4:1–3; Doctrine and Covenants 76:25–27.
16. See Doctrine and Covenants 76:22–24.
17. “Who Is Our Savior?” *Improvement Era*, Nov. 1962, 798–99.
18. See Doctrine and Covenants 93:12–20.
19. See Alma 7:11–13.
20. See Luke 24:36–39; 1 Corinthians 15:55; Alma 11:41–45; 3 Nephi 11:7–14.
21. Bible Dictionary, “Christ,” 633.
22. Moses 1:39.
23. “A Vision,” *Millennial Star*, Aug. 1843, 51; see Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2nd ed. (1966), 65–66; see also Doctrine and Covenants 76:21–24.
24. Doctrine and Covenants 107:23.
25. “The Living Christ: The Testimony of the Apostles.”

Elder W. Rolfe Kerr

Prophets speak the words of Christ

I feel it a sacred honor and a privilege to have joined with members of the Church around the world in sustaining the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles as prophets, seers, and revelators. We humbly declare that they are “special witnesses of the name of Christ in all the world” (D&C 107:23). We testify that they “speak as they are moved upon by the Holy Ghost. And whatsoever they shall speak when moved upon by the Holy Ghost shall be scripture, shall be the will of the Lord, shall be the mind of the Lord, shall be the word of the Lord, shall be the voice of the Lord, and the power of God unto salvation” (D&C 68:3–4). The Savior said, “Whether by mine own voice or by the voice of my servants, it is the same” (D&C 1:38). We declare to the world that these latter-day servants of the Lord speak the words of Christ.

The Book of Mormon is the word of God

The Savior said, “Search the scriptures; for . . . they are they which testify of me” (John 5:39). The Apostle Paul wrote to his trusted companion Timothy, saying, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16). We declare to the world that the Book of Mormon is

scripture, given by inspiration of God. It too is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness.

We fervently declare that the Book of Mormon is the word of God, translated from ancient records by the gift and power of God. This ancient record was written and preserved to come forth in fulfillment of prophecy as a companion scripture to the Holy Bible, the two to be used as one in the hands of the Lord (see Ezekiel 37:16–20). In the Book of Mormon we are admonished to “feast upon the words of Christ; for behold, the words of Christ will tell you all things what ye should do” (2 Nephi 32:3). We testify that the Book of Mormon is a second witness of the life and mission of the Savior. It is, indeed, “Another Testament of Jesus Christ.” We declare that the Book of Mormon contains the words of Christ.

Christ’s ministry in ancient America

Six hundred years before the birth of Christ, the Lord directed the ancient prophet Lehi to leave Jerusalem with his family and embark on a marvelous journey that would ultimately take them across the many waters to a land that would become a “promised land” to them. The Book of Mormon is the scriptural record of the sojourn of these people in ancient America. It contains the prophetic writings and

revelations given to these people. Included in these divine communications are many prophecies of the Savior's birth, His ministry, and His great atoning sacrifice. They describe His ultimate Crucifixion and Resurrection and foretell of His coming to that ancient American civilization. We read in the Book of Mormon that after His Resurrection and soon after His Ascension into heaven, Jesus Christ did truly manifest Himself unto them. Hear and feel with me the description of this marvelous event in history:

"Now it came to pass that there were a great multitude gathered together. . . .

"And they were . . . conversing about this Jesus Christ, of whom the sign had been given concerning his death.

"And . . . while they were thus conversing one with another, they heard a voice as if it came out of heaven; and . . . they understood not the voice which they heard; . . . it was not a harsh voice, neither was it a loud voice; nevertheless, . . . it being a small voice it did pierce them that did hear to the center, insomuch that there was no part of their frame that it did not cause to quake; yea, it did pierce them to the very soul, and did cause their hearts to burn.

"And . . . again they heard the voice, and they understood it not.

"And again the third time they did hear the voice, and did open their ears to hear it; and their eyes were towards the sound thereof; and they did look steadfastly towards heaven, from whence the sound came.

"And behold, the third time they did understand the voice which they heard; and it said unto them:

"Behold my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, in whom I have glorified my name—hear ye him.

"And . . . as they understood they cast their eyes up again towards heaven; and behold, they saw a Man descending out of heaven; and he was clothed in a white

robe; and he came down and stood in the midst of them; . . .

"And it came to pass that he stretched forth his hand and spake unto the people, saying:

"Behold, I am Jesus Christ, whom the prophets testified shall come into the world.

"And behold, I am the light and the life of the world; and I have drunk out of that bitter cup which the Father hath given me, and have glorified the Father in taking upon me the sins of the world, in the which I have suffered the will of the Father in all things from the beginning.

"And it came to pass that when Jesus had spoken these words the whole multitude fell to the earth; for they remembered that it had been prophesied among them that Christ should show himself unto them after his ascension into heaven" (3 Nephi 11:1–12).

The Savior blessed those people and taught them His glorious gospel just as He had done in Jerusalem. We are blessed to have within the pages of the Book of Mormon His words, even the very words of Christ, as spoken to that ancient civilization.

Words of Christ are a personal Liahona

After Lehi and his family were commanded to leave Jerusalem, they were given a sacred instrument which worked as a compass for them, showing them the course that they should travel. We read that it worked only according to their faith in God. Alma, a Book of Mormon prophet, told his son Helaman that the compass was called "Liahona" (see Alma 37:38). He said:

"And now, my son, I would that ye should understand that these things are not without a shadow; for as our fathers were slothful to give heed to this compass (now these things were temporal) they did not prosper; even so it is with things which are spiritual.

“For behold, it is as easy to give heed to the word of Christ, which will point to you a straight course to eternal bliss, as it was for our fathers to give heed to this compass, which would point unto them a straight course to the promised land.

“And now I say, is there not a type in this thing? For just as surely as this director did bring our fathers, by following its course, to the promised land, shall the words of Christ, if we follow their course, carry us beyond this vale of sorrow into a far better land of promise.

“O my son, do not let us be slothful because of the easiness of the way” (Alma 37:43–46).

So we see, brethren and sisters, that the words of Christ can be a personal Liahona for each of us, showing us the way. Let us not be slothful because of the easiness of the way. Let us in faith take the words of Christ into our minds and into our hearts as they are recorded in sacred scripture and as they are uttered by living prophets, seers, and revelators. Let us with faith and diligence feast upon the words of Christ, for the words of Christ will be our spiritual Liahona telling us all things what we should do. Of this I bear solemn testimony, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Elder Francisco J. Viñas

Establishing gospel principles in the home

In the general Relief Society meeting in September of 1998, President Gordon B. Hinckley declared: “I believe our problems, almost every one, arise out of the homes of the people. If there is to be reformation, if there is to be a change, if there is to be a return to old and sacred values, it must begin in the home. It is here that truth is learned, that integrity is cultivated, that self-discipline is instilled, and that love is nurtured” (“Walking in the Light of the Lord,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1998, 99).

Among the old and sacred values to which we should return are the plain and simple principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ. These should be firmly established in our homes to ensure happiness in family life.

President Wilford Woodruff declared: “The Lord has a great many principles in store for us, and the greatest principles which he has for us are the most simple and plain. The first principles of the gospel which lead us unto eternal life are the simplest and yet none are more glorious or

important unto us” (“Remarks,” *Deseret News*, Apr. 1, 1857, 27).

It is precisely because these principles are plain and simple that many times they are not considered when there are challenges to face that affect family life. At times we have the tendency to think that the more serious the problem, the bigger and more complex the solution should be. That idea can lead us, for example, to seek help from people or institutions outside the home when in reality the most effective solution will come by applying the glorious principles of the gospel in our homes in the small actions and duties of everyday life. The scriptures remind us “that by small and simple things are great things brought to pass” (Alma 37:6).

Principles of successful families

In “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles declare that “successful marriages and families are established and maintained on principles of faith, prayer, repentance, forgive-

ness, respect, love, compassion, work, and wholesome recreational activities” (*Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102).

By analyzing these principles, we can see that the majority of them are related to and complement each other and that the power that makes it possible for them to be incorporated into our lives comes from the atoning sacrifice of our Redeemer and Savior Jesus Christ.

These principles, once applied, will act as a light that will illuminate each member of the family and, in a progressive way, will lead us to integrate other related values and principles which will strengthen family relationships. We know that “he that receiveth light, and continueth in God, receiveth more light; and that light groweth brighter and brighter until the perfect day” (D&C 50:24).

If we succeed in establishing and maintaining our families by applying these principles, we will be able to observe the powerful impact that these will have in situations that affect our homes day by day. Any hurts caused by the friction of living together will heal. Offenses will be forgiven. Pride and selfishness will be replaced by humility, compassion, and love.

The principles that we choose to incorporate into our lives will determine the spirit that we contribute in our relationships with others. When we adopt a principle, its influence radiates from us and can be felt by others.

Now more than ever, when we see that the family is at the center of attacks from the forces of evil—as in the days of the prophet Mormon, when “the power of the evil one was wrought upon all the face of the land” (Mormon 1:19)—it is necessary for us as parents to incorporate these principles into our lives in order to radiate their influence and for this influence to be perceived by our children.

Faith in Christ is built in the home

I would now like to show how these principles can be put into practice, forming part of a process that will put the effects of the Atonement within the reach of individuals and families. This process begins with the first principle of the gospel: faith.

In a world of changing values where evil is called good and good evil (see Isaiah 5:20), the words declared by Mormon fill us with hope and confidence by teaching us that Jesus Christ “claimeth all those who have faith in him; and they who have faith in him will cleave unto every good thing” (Moroni 7:28).

That faith that causes us to cleave unto every good thing comes by hearing the word of God (see Romans 10:17), and this word is heard with more power in family home evening lessons and in family scripture study. There is no better place to build faith than in the home, where the lessons and practical applications are realized and lived day to day.

The Atonement and repentance

It is in the home that one learns that faith is intimately related to the Atonement, “this being the intent of this last sacrifice, to bring about the bowels of mercy, which overpowereth justice, and bringeth about means unto men that they may have faith unto repentance” (Alma 34:15).

Without the effects of the Atonement in our lives, it would be impossible to develop the type of faith necessary for repentance, and so we would remain outside the marvelous plan of mercy since “only unto him that has faith unto repentance is brought about the great and eternal plan of redemption” (Alma 34:16).

Repentance—that change that takes place in the heart, that is born of love for the Lord, that leads us to move away from

sin and submit to His will—can “become effective and accepted by God” “only through the atonement of Jesus Christ” (Guide to the Scriptures, “Repent, Repentance,” 206).

Baptism and the Holy Ghost

Once God has accepted repentance, the process that we are describing leads us to participate in ordinances and the covenants associated with them, such as baptism and confirmation. The renewal of these covenants is brought about when we regularly and worthily partake of the sacrament, and then the remission of our sins is realized.

After receiving a remission of sins and striving to retain it through obedience to the commandments, we will receive, as described in the book of Moroni, meekness and lowliness of heart, which will allow the visitation of the Holy Ghost, which Comforter will fill us with hope and perfect love, love that will be maintained by the diligence we give to the principle of prayer (see Moroni 8:26).

The person who obtains meekness and lowliness of heart and who enjoys the company of the Holy Ghost will have no desire to offend or hurt others, nor will he feel affected by any offenses received from others. He will treat his spouse and children with love and respect and will have good relationships with everyone he associates with. In occupying positions of leadership in the Church, he will apply the same principles as he does in the home, showing that there is no difference between the person he is when within the walls of his own home and the person he is in his relationship with the members of the Church.

Vaccines to combat the disease of sin

Principles like faith, repentance, love, forgiveness, and prayer, lived in the process I just described, become the best vac-

cine to combat the disease of sin, which can manifest itself in families in different ways, such as immorality, pride, envy, contention, abuse, and other practices that affect family relationships and that result in pain, deception, and the breakup of family ties.

The decision to incorporate them into our lives and the opportunity to begin the process whenever it may be necessary depends solely on our agency. It is a simple process that is within the reach of all. It is based on the fundamental principles of the gospel that have been and continue to be applied successfully by all those who put their trust in the Lord.

It is our duty to continue teaching them to a world that needs them more all the time, because:

“Hath he commanded any that they should not partake of his salvation? Behold I say unto you, Nay; but he hath given it free for all men; and he hath commanded his people that they should persuade all men to repentance” (2 Nephi 26:27).

I share with you my testimony that these principles are true. I testify that the Atonement of Jesus Christ makes it possible to incorporate them into our lives. I know this because I am striving together with my family to live in accordance with them. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

President Faust

We remind the brethren of the general priesthood meeting, which will convene in the Conference Center this evening at 6:00 p.m. mountain standard time. We call your attention to the need to move your clocks ahead one hour before retiring tonight because of the change to daylight saving time.

The nationwide Tabernacle Choir broadcast tomorrow morning will be from 9:30 to 10:00 a.m. mountain daylight time. The Sunday morning session of conference will immediately follow.

We thank the Relief Society choir from stakes in Salt Lake for their beautiful music which they have provided this afternoon. They will now sing “Come, Ye Children of the Lord.”

Our concluding speaker at this session will be Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. Follow-

ing his remarks, the choir will sing “Go Forth with Faith.” At the conclusion of the singing, the benediction will be offered by Elder Steven E. Snow of the Seventy.

The choir sang “Come, Ye Children of the Lord.”

Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin

Beware of covetousness

My beloved brethren and sisters, what a glorious event it is to attend conference. We find that the words spoken are words of inspiration, and it's a joy to be present.

I would like to talk about our heavenly debts and earthly debts. The Gospels record that nearly everywhere the Savior went, He was surrounded by multitudes of people. Some hoped that He would heal them; others came to hear Him speak. Others came for practical advice. Toward the end of His mortal ministry, some came to mock and ridicule Him and to clamor for His crucifixion.

One day a man approached the Savior and asked Him to intervene in a family dispute. “Master, speak to my brother,” he pleaded, “that he divide the inheritance with me.”

The Savior refused to take sides on this issue, but He did teach an important lesson. “Beware of covetousness,” He told him, “for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.”¹

Brothers and sisters, beware of covetousness. It is one of the great afflictions of these latter days. It creates greed and resentment. Often it leads to bondage, heartbreak, and crushing, grinding debt.

The number of marriages that have been shattered over money issues is staggering. The amount of heartbreak is great. The stress that comes from worry over

money has burdened families, caused sickness, depression, and even premature death.

Earthly debts

In spite of the teachings of the Church from its earliest days until today, members sometimes fall victim to many unwise and foolish financial practices. Some continue to spend, thinking that somehow the money will become available. Somehow they will survive.

Far too often, the money hoped for does not appear.

Remember this: debt is a form of bondage. It is a financial termite. When we make purchases on credit, they give us only an illusion of prosperity. We think we own things, but the reality is, our things own us.

Some debt—such as for a modest home, expenses for education, perhaps for a needed first car—may be necessary. But never should we enter into financial bondage through consumer debt without carefully weighing the costs.

We have often heard that interest is a good servant but a terrible master. President J. Reuben Clark Jr. described it this way: “Interest never sleeps nor sickens nor dies; it never goes to the hospital; it works on Sundays and holidays; it never takes a vacation. . . . Once in debt, interest is your companion every minute of the day and night; you cannot shun it or slip away

from it; you cannot dismiss it; it yields neither to entreaties, demands, or orders; and whenever you get in its way or cross its course or fail to meet its demands, it crushes you.”²

The counsel from the other inspired prophets in our time on this subject is clear, and what was true 50 or 150 years ago is also true today.

President Heber J. Grant said, “From my earliest recollections, from the days of Brigham Young until now, I have listened to men standing in the pulpit . . . urging the people not to run into debt; and I believe that the great majority of all our troubles today is caused through the failure to carry out that counsel.”³

President Ezra Taft Benson said: “Do not leave yourself or your family unprotected against financial storms. . . . Build up savings.”⁴

President Harold B. Lee taught, “Not only should we teach men to get out of debt but we should teach them likewise to stay out of debt.”⁵

President Gordon B. Hinckley said:

“Many of our people are living on the very edge of their incomes. In fact, some are living on borrowings. . . .

“ . . . I urge you to be modest in your expenditures; discipline yourselves in your purchases to avoid debt to the extent possible. Pay off debt as quickly as you can, and free yourselves from bondage.”⁶

My brothers and sisters, many have heeded this prophetic counsel. They live within their means, they honor the debts they have incurred, and they strive to reduce the burden they owe to others. We congratulate those who are doing so, for the day will come when they will reap the blessings of their efforts and understand the value of this inspired counsel.

However, others struggle when it comes to finances. Some are victims of adverse and often unforeseen events that have financially damaged them. Others are in financial bondage because they

have not learned to discipline themselves and control their impulses to spend. Consequently, they have made unwise financial choices.

Five steps to financial freedom

May I suggest five key steps to financial freedom for your consideration.

First, pay your tithing.

Do you want the windows of heaven opened to you? Do you wish to receive blessings so great there is not room enough to receive them?⁷ Always pay your tithing and leave the outcome in the hands of the Lord.

Obedience to God’s commandments is the foundation for a happy life. Surely we will be blessed with the gifts of heaven for our obedience. Failure to pay tithing by those who know the principle can lead to heartache in this life and perhaps sorrow in the next.

Second, spend less than you earn.

This is simple counsel but a powerful secret for financial happiness. All too often a family’s spending is governed more by their *yearning* than by their earning. They somehow believe that their life will be better if they surround themselves with an abundance of things. All too often all they are left with is avoidable anxiety and distress.

Those who live safely within their means know how much money comes in each month, and even though it is difficult, they discipline themselves to spend less than that amount.

Credit is so easy to obtain. In fact, it is almost thrust upon us. Those who use credit cards to overspend unwisely should consider eliminating them. It is much better that a plastic credit card should perish than a family dwindle and perish in debt.

Third, learn to save.

Remember the lesson of Joseph of Egypt. During times of prosperity, save up for a day of want.⁸

Too often people assume that they probably never will be injured, get sick, lose their jobs, or see their investments evaporate. To make matters worse, often people make purchases today based upon optimistic predictions of what they hope will happen tomorrow.

The wise understand the importance of saving today for a rainy day tomorrow. They have adequate insurance that will provide for them in case of illness or death. Where possible they store a year's supply of food, water, and other basic necessities of life. They set aside money in savings and investment accounts. They work diligently to reduce the debt they owe to others and strive to become debt free.

Brothers and sisters, the preparations you make today may one day be to you as the stored food was to the Egyptians and to Joseph's father's family.

Fourth, honor your financial obligations.

From time to time we hear stories of greed and selfishness that strike us with great sorrow. We hear of fraud, defaulting on loan commitments, financial deceptions, and bankruptcies.

We hear of fathers who financially neglect their own families. We say to men and women everywhere, if you bring children into the world, it is your solemn obligation to do all within your power to provide for them. No man is fit to be called a man who gathers around himself cars, boats, and other possessions while neglecting the sacred financial obligations he has to his own wife and children.

We are a people of integrity. We believe in honoring our debts and being honest in our dealings with our fellowmen.

Let me tell you the story of one man who sacrificed greatly to maintain his own financial integrity and honor.

In the 1930s Fred Snowberger opened the doors of a new pharmacy in northeastern Oregon. It had been his dream to own his own business, but the economic turn-

around he had hoped for never materialized. Eight months later, Fred closed the doors of his pharmacy for the last time.

Even though his business had failed, Fred was determined to repay the loan he had secured. Some wondered why he insisted on repaying the debt. Why didn't he simply declare bankruptcy and have the debt legally forgiven?

But Fred did not listen. He had said he would repay the loan, and he was determined to honor his word. His family made many of their own clothes, grew much of their food in their garden, and used everything they had until it was thoroughly worn out or used up. Rain or shine, Fred walked to and from his work each day. And every month, Fred paid what he could on the loan.

Years passed, and finally the wonderful day arrived when Fred made the last payment. He delivered it in person. The man who had loaned him the money wept, and with tears streaming down his face he said, "You not only paid back every penny, but you taught me what a man of character and honesty is."

To this day, nearly 70 years after Fred signed his name to that note, descendants of Fred and Erma Snowberger still tell this story with pride. This act of honor and nobility has lived through the decades as a cherished example of family integrity.

Fifth, teach your children to follow your example.

Too many of our youth get into financial difficulty because they never learned proper principles of financial common sense at home. Teach your children while they are young. Teach them that they cannot have something merely because they want it. Teach them the principles of hard work, frugality, and saving.

If you don't consider yourself informed well enough to teach them, all the more reason for you to begin learning. Abundant resources are available—from classes to books to other resources.

There are those among us who have been blessed abundantly with enough and to spare. Our Heavenly Father expects that we do more with our riches than build larger barns to hold them. Will you consider what more you can do to build the kingdom of God? Will you consider what more you can do to bless the lives of others and bring light and hope into their lives?

Heavenly debts

We have spoken of earthly debts and our duty to repay them. But there are other debts—debts more eternal in nature—that are not so easy to repay. In fact, we will never be able to repay some of them. These are heavenly debts.

Our mothers and fathers gave us life and brought us into this world. They gave us the opportunity to obtain mortal bodies and experience the joys and sorrows of this bounteous earth. In many cases they set their own dreams and desires aside for the sake of their children. How fitting it is that we honor them and show by word and deed our love for them and our gratitude.

We also have a great debt to our ancestors, who have preceded us and who wait beyond the veil for those ordinances that will allow them to continue their eternal progression. This is a debt we can repay for them in our temples.

What a debt we owe to the Lord for restoring His divine Church and true gospel in these latter days through the Prophet Joseph Smith. From his youth until his martyrdom, he devoted his days to bringing to mankind the gospel of Jesus Christ that had been lost. We owe our deepest gratitude to him and to all men in this sacred calling who have been given the mantle to preside over His Church.

How can we ever repay the debt we owe to the Savior? He paid a debt He did not owe to free us from a debt we can never pay. Because of Him we will live forever.

Because of His infinite Atonement, our sins can be swept away, allowing us to experience the greatest of all the gifts of God: eternal life.⁹

Can such a gift have a price? Can we ever make compensation for such a gift? The Book of Mormon prophet King Benjamin taught “that if you should render all the thanks and praise which your whole soul has power to possess . . . [and] serve him with all your whole souls yet ye would be unprofitable servants.”¹⁰

Treasures in heaven

We have earthly debts and heavenly debts. Let us be wise in dealing with each of them and ever keep in mind the words of the Savior. The scriptures tell us, “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven.”¹¹ The riches of this world are as dust compared to the riches that await the faithful in the mansions of our Heavenly Father. How foolish is he who spends his days in the pursuit of things that rust and fade away. How wise is he who spends his days in the pursuit of eternal life.

Know within your hearts that Jesus the Christ lives. Be at peace, for as you draw near to Him, He will draw near to you. Let not your hearts be weary, but rejoice. Through the Prophet Joseph Smith, the gospel is restored once again. The heavens are not sealed. As in ancient days, we have a man who communicates with the Infinite. A prophet, President Gordon B. Hinckley, walks the earth in our day and at this time. I so testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Luke 12:13, 15.
2. In Conference Report, Apr. 1938, 103.
3. In Conference Report, Oct. 1921, 3.

4. *Pay Thy Debt, and Live . . .*, Brigham Young University Speeches of the Year (Feb. 28, 1962), 10.
5. *The Teachings of Harold B. Lee*, ed. Clyde J. Williams (1996), 315.
6. In Conference Report, Oct. 1998, 70, 72; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1998, 53–54.
7. See Malachi 3:10.
8. See Genesis 41:47–57.

9. See Doctrine and Covenants 14:7.
10. Mosiah 2:20–21.
11. Matthew 6:19–20.

The choir sang “Go Forth with Faith.” Elder Steven E. Snow offered the benediction.

GENERAL PRIESTHOOD SESSION

The general priesthood session, the third session of the 174th Annual General Conference, convened in the Conference Center at 6:00 p.m. on Saturday, April 3, 2004. President James E. Faust conducted this session.

Music was provided by a priesthood choir from the Orem and Salt Lake institutes. Douglas Brenchley, Don Keaton, and Ryan Eggett directed the choir, and John Longhurst was the organist.

President Faust opened the meeting with the following remarks.

President James E. Faust

We welcome you, brethren, to the general priesthood session of the 174th Annual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. President Gordon B. Hinckley, who presides at this conference, has asked that I, Brother Faust, conduct this session.

These services are being relayed by satellite transmission to holders of the priesthood gathered in the Tabernacle, the Assembly Hall, the BYU Marriott Center, the Provo Missionary Training Center, and in locations in many countries of the world.

The singing during this session will be furnished by a priesthood choir from

the Orem and Salt Lake institutes, under the direction of Douglas Brenchley, Don Keaton, and Ryan Eggett, with John Longhurst at the organ.

We shall begin this session with the choir singing “Praise the Lord with Heart and Voice.” The invocation will then be offered by Elder Christoffel Golden Jr. of the Seventy.

The choir sang “Praise the Lord with Heart and Voice.”

Elder Christoffel Golden Jr. offered the invocation.

President Faust

The choir will now sing “Beautiful Savior.” At the conclusion of the singing, Elder Neal A. Maxwell of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles will address us. He will be followed by Elder Mervyn B. Arnold of the Seventy, after which we shall hear from Elder Earl C. Tingey of the Presidency of the Seventy.

The choir sang “Beautiful Savior.”

Elder Neal A. Maxwell

Being stretched by a merciful Lord

Brethren, please allow me to reminisce informally and gratefully. Hopefully this will be done in a relaxed, almost conversational way by citing a few remembrances, a few of life's little lessons—nothing spectacular. There will also be several one-liners whose durability reflects their brevity. The focus of these remembrances is upon being stretched by a merciful Lord (see Moroni 10:3).

If just one of these remembrances can be “likened” unto yourselves (see 1 Nephi 19:23), there might be a brief father and son discussion later on.

Training of youth

Let's go back 60 years. The minutes of the Wandamere Ward of the Grant Stake for June 4, 1944, indicate the sacrament was administered by my friends Ward Jackson, Arthur Hicks, and me to a congregation of 141. Then it was off to war. In May of 1945, I was blessing the sacrament again—but in a foxhole on Okinawa for a congregation of only one—myself!

The training of my youth took over without fanfare—something only partially appreciated by me then—including abstaining from coffee in those same circumstances when water was scarce and highly chlorinated.

I do not know what lies ahead of you young men, but my advice would be to fasten your seat belts and hold on firmly to your principles!

In my Primary days we sang “‘Give,’ Said the Little Stream” (*Children's Songbook*, 236)—certainly sweet and motivating but not exactly theologically drenched. Today's children, as you know, sing the more spiritually focused “I'm Trying to Be like Jesus” (*Children's Songbook*, 78–79).

Back then, in family, neighborhood, ward, and school life, we were all poor together, but we didn't know it. We made room for each other to grow, to make dumb mistakes, to repent, and to begin to develop at least some spiritual reflexes. Today some anxious parents seem to insist on constantly pulling up the daisies to see how the roots are doing.

Examples and influences

Young or old, my priesthood brothers, be grateful for people in your lives who love you enough to correct you, to remind you of your standards and possibilities, even when you don't want to be reminded.

A dear and now deceased friend said to me years ago when I had said something sardonic, “You could have gone all day without saying that.” His one-liner reproof was lovingly stated, illustrating how correction can be an act of affection.

When loved ones exemplify, it is especially memorable. My sister Lois, legally blind from birth, not only coped but served well as a public schoolteacher for 33 years. She had that same reflex possessed by those pioneer souls who quietly picked up their handcarts and headed west—a reflex we all need. So if various trials are allotted to you, partake of life's bitter cups, but without becoming bitter.

Soon after arriving home from World War II, I had “promises to keep” (Robert Frost, “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening”)—meaning going on a mission *now*. I grew tired of waiting for the bishop. And in some early ark-steadying, I went to the bishop's home and said I had saved the money and wanted to go, so let's “get this show on the road.” The good bishop hesitated and then said he'd been meaning to ask me about going.

Years later I would learn from that bishop's devoted ward clerk that the bishop had felt I needed a little more time with my family after having been away so far and for a tenth of my life. Hearing this, I chastised myself for having been too judgmental. (See Bruce C. Hafen, *A Disciple's Life: The Biography of Neal A. Maxwell* [2002], 129–30.)

No wonder the wise father of Elder Henry B. Eyring observed once how the Lord had a perfect Church until He let all of us inside!

Teaching children with wisdom

Two relevant memories for young fathers. When I was such, I had just received a phone call telling me of a friend's death in an accident. I was sitting in the living room with tears streaking down my cheeks. Our young son, Cory, saw the tears as he passed in the hallway. I learned that he had anxiously assumed the tears were because he had disappointed me in some way. He didn't know about the phone call. Brethren, we underestimate how genuinely and frequently our children want to please us.

Having virtually no quantitative skills, I was seldom if ever able to help our children with math and scientific subjects. One day our high school daughter Nancy asked me for "a little help" regarding a Supreme Court case, *Fletcher v. Peck*. I was so eager to help after so many times of not being able to help. At last a chance to unload! Out came what I knew about *Fletcher v. Peck*. Finally my frustrated daughter said, "Dad, I need only a little help!" I was meeting my own needs rather than giving her "a little help."

We worship a Lord who teaches us precept by precept, brethren, so even when we are teaching our children the gospel, let's not dump the whole load of hay.

Press forward in the gospel

In later years I saw a few leave the Church who could then never leave it alone. They used often their intellectual reservations to cover their behavioral lapses (see Neal A. Maxwell, *All These Things Shall Give Thee Experience* [1979], 110). You will see some of that. By the way, do not expect the world's solutions to the world's problems to be very effective. Such solutions often resemble what C. S. Lewis wrote about those who go dashing back and forth with fire extinguishers in times of flood (see *The Screwtape Letters* [1959], 117–18). Only the gospel is constantly relevant, and the substitute things won't work.

Once when traveling with Elder and Sister Russell M. Nelson, we left our hotel in Bombay, India, to catch a plane for Karachi, Pakistan, and then on to Islamabad. When we got to the chaotic airport, our flight had been canceled. Impatiently, I said to the man at the airline counter, "What do you expect us to do, just give up and go back to the hotel?" He said with great dignity, "Sir, you never go back to the hotel." We rummaged about the airport, found a flight, kept the appointment in Islamabad, and even had a night's sleep. Sometimes life is like that: we are left to press forward and endure frustrated expectations—refusing to "go back to the hotel"! Otherwise, such "give-up-itis" will affect all seasons of life. Besides, the Lord knows how many miles we have to go "before [we] sleep"! ("Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening").

Learning from family

In 1956, after returning home from several years in Washington, D.C., and having declined several attractive offers there, I received an offer to work at the University of Utah. My wife said I should

take it. She said presciently, “I feel if you go there, maybe you will have some influence on students.” I replied impatiently, “I’ll be typing news releases, not working with students.” The subsequent opportunities included being a bishop of a student ward, dean of students, and teaching hundreds of fine students in political science. It wasn’t status that mattered, of course, but being stretched and being given opportunities to serve.

Our wives are often inspired but sometimes in counterintuitive ways—a reality, young men, which your fathers may be brave enough to explain to you sometime.

It’s interesting, too, how we create, cumulatively, expectations in the lives of our grandchildren even when we are not aware of it. Some years ago, when our grandson Robbie was about five, we dropped by to see his family in Orem. He was asleep upstairs, and his mother called, “Robbie, Grandpa Neal is here!” A tired little voice floated downstairs saying, “Shall I bring my scriptures?”

Of course he was too young to read them, but he carried them, as so many do in the Church today in that fine new pattern!

Brethren, there are clusters of memories embedded in each of your lives. And these can help us to “remember how merciful the Lord hath been” (Moroni 10:3). He certainly has been to me!

Submitting our wills to God

Brethren, as you submit your wills to God, you are giving Him the *only* thing you *can* actually give Him that is really yours to give. Don’t wait too long to find the altar or to begin to place the gift of your wills upon it! No need to wait for a receipt; the Lord has His own special ways of acknowledging.

I testify to you that God has known you individually, brethren, for a long, long time (see D&C 93:23). He has loved you for a long, long time. He not only knows the names of all the stars (see Psalm 147:4; Isaiah 40:26), He knows your names and all your heartaches and your joys! By the way, you have never seen an immortal star; they finally expire. But seated by you tonight are immortal individuals—imperfect but who are, nevertheless, “trying to be like Jesus”! In His name, even Jesus Christ, amen.

Elder Mervyn B. Arnold

A persistent leader activates a young man

Brother José de Souza Marques was the type of leader who truly understood the principle taught by the Savior: “And if any man among you be strong in the Spirit, let him take with him him that is weak, that he may be edified in all meekness, that he may become strong also” (D&C 84:106).

As a member of the branch presidency in Fortaleza, Brazil, Brother Marques, with the other priesthood leaders, developed a plan to reactivate those who were less active in his branch. One of those

who was less active was a young man by the name of Fernando Araujo. Recently I spoke to Fernando, and he told me of his experience:

“I became involved in surfing competitions on Sunday mornings and stopped going to my Church meetings. One Sunday morning, Brother Marques knocked on my door and asked my nonmember mother if he could talk to me. When she told him I was sleeping, he asked permission to wake me. He said to me, ‘Fernando, you are late for church!’ Not listening to my excuses, he took me to church.

“The next Sunday the same thing happened, so on the third Sunday I decided to leave early to avoid him. As I opened the gate I found him sitting on his car, reading the scriptures. When he saw me he said, ‘Good! You are up early. Today we will go and find another young man!’ I appealed to my agency, but he said, ‘We can talk about that later.’

“After eight Sundays I could not get rid of him, so I decided to sleep at a friend’s house. I was at the beach the next morning when I saw a man dressed in a suit and tie walking toward me. When I saw that it was Brother Marques, I ran into the water. All of a sudden I felt someone’s hand on my shoulder. It was Brother Marques, in water up to his chest! He took me by the hand and said, ‘You are late! Let’s go.’ When I argued that I didn’t have any clothes to wear, he replied, ‘They are in the car.’

“That day as we walked out of the ocean, I was touched by Brother Marques’s sincere love and worry for me. He truly understood the Savior’s words: ‘I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick’ (Ezekiel 34:16). Brother Marques didn’t just give me a ride to church—the quorum made sure I remained active. They planned activities that made me feel needed and wanted, I received a calling, and the quorum members became my friends.”

Following his reactivation, Brother Araujo went on a full-time mission and has served as bishop, stake president, mission president, and regional representative. His widowed mother, three sisters, and several cousins have also entered the waters of baptism.

Rescue work is the focus in quorums

When speaking about the work of the Aaronic Priesthood quorums in his ward,

Brother Araujo, who is once again serving as a bishop, stated:

“Our rescue work is the focus in all three quorums of the Aaronic Priesthood. We have a list of each one of our lost sheep. The quorum presidencies, advisers, and bishopric divide up and go visit them on a regular basis. We visit not only the less-active members, but we also visit the nonmembers in less-active or part-member families.

“Activities are organized to reach each young man. We discuss each young man in our quorum presidency meetings and in our monthly bishopric youth committee meetings. In 2003 we managed to rescue five priests, one teacher, and two deacons, who are now active in their quorums. We have also reactivated some families and have enjoyed the blessing of seeing some nonmembers enter the waters of baptism.”

As I reflected on the desire of these priesthood brethren to fulfill their sacred duties, spending the bulk of their time ministering instead of administering, these words of the Savior came into my mind:

“For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in:

“Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me” (Matthew 25:35–36).

Jesus’s example in finding the lost sheep

The Savior’s example of going the extra mile to find His lost sheep is evident throughout the scriptures. “What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine and go into the wilderness after that which is lost, until he find it?” (Joseph Smith Translation, Luke 15:4). The Good Shepherd knew when one of His sheep was missing: “He numbereth his sheep, and they know him” (1 Nephi 22:25), “and he calleth his own sheep by name” (John

10:3). He went “into the wilderness,” which at times has been defined as “a confusing multitude or mass” (*Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th ed. [2003], “wilderness,” 1432), and He searched for that which was lost.

We are not told how long it took the Good Shepherd to find the lost sheep or if others helped in the search, but we do know that “they [knew] his voice” (John 10:4) and that He loved them. We also know that *He did not give up*, that He did “go . . . after that which [was] lost, until he [did] find it” (Luke 15:4), and that when *He returned*, the lost sheep was safely on His shoulders. And then He exclaims: “Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth” (Luke 15:6–7).

To the shepherds of Israel

In Ezekiel chapter 34 we read the prophet’s warning voice:

“And the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, . . .

“ . . . Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! should not the shepherds feed the flocks? . . .

“My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and upon every high hill: yea, my flock was scattered upon all the face of the earth, and none did search or seek after them. . . .

“As I live, saith the Lord God, surely because my flock became a prey, and my flock became meat to every beast of the field, because there was no shepherd, neither did my shepherds search for my flock . . . ;

“ . . . *I will require my flock at their hand*” (verses 1–2, 6, 8, 10; italics added).

The Lord has always required that those He entrusts with His holy priesthood, including fathers, quorum leaders, and

quorum members, be held accountable for His flocks. Brethren, we must search and seek out our flocks, and we must not allow our flocks to become “meat to every beast of the field.”

In section 20 of the Doctrine and Covenants, the Savior teaches us many of our duties as priesthood holders and quorum members. The following action words and phrases underline His sense of urgency: “watch over,” “take the lead,” “expound,” “visit the house of each member,” “pray,” “strengthen,” “warn,” “send,” “teach,” “exhort,” “baptize,” and “*invite all to come unto Christ*” (verses 42, 44, 46–47, 53, 59, 81–82; italics added).

I also felt the urgency in President Hinckley’s voice when he stated, “Let us, every one, resolve within ourselves to arise to a new opportunity, a new sense of responsibility, a new shouldering of obligation to assist our Father in Heaven in His glorious work of bringing to pass the immortality and eternal life of His sons and daughters throughout the earth” (“Find the Lambs, Feed the Sheep,” *Ensign*, May 1999, 110).

Examples of good shepherds

I am grateful for the example of the Good Shepherd, who did not give up until He had His lost sheep safely home; for the examples of President Thomas S. Monson, who while serving as a bishop left his flock in the care of the adviser and went to the West Temple Garage to rescue Richard from a grease pit (see Conference Report, Oct. 1984, 56; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1984, 43); of Brother Marques, who rescued Fernando from the ocean; of a quorum adviser and various quorum members I am well acquainted with who knocked on Scott’s bedroom window every Sunday morning for six months, fellowshipped and loved him, until Scott returned to the fold; and

for the examples of many of you who have gone the extra mile until you have found that which was lost.

Your efforts will have an eternal effect on the lives of your quorum members and their posterity for generations to come. They will be living testimonies of the promise given by the Savior when He said: “Feed the flock of God which is among you, . . . and when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away” (1 Peter 5:2, 4), “that you may bring souls unto me, that you may rest with them in the kingdom of my Father” (D&C 15:6), and “how great will be your joy” (D&C 18:16).

Elder Earl C. Tingey

Things as they really are

My dear brethren of the priesthood, how honored I am to be with you this evening. Four of my grandsons are in the Conference Center tonight—Craig, Brent, Kendall, and Michael. I would like to speak to them and all Aaronic Priesthood bearers and invite others to listen.

In a message from the First Presidency, included in the *For the Strength of Youth* booklet, we read:

“Our beloved young men . . . , we have great confidence in you. You are choice spirits who have come forth in this day when the responsibilities and opportunities, as well as the temptations, are the greatest. You are at the beginning of your journey through this mortal life. Your Heavenly Father wants your life to be joyful and to lead you back into His presence. The decisions you make now will determine much of what will follow during your life and throughout eternity.”¹

You live in a world of great uncertainty. There are many voices. There are many paths. Not all lead to our Heavenly Father. How will you know to whom to listen or where to go?

Strengthen those who are weak

May each quorum and each one of us individually, working in conjunction with the councils of the Church, follow the example of our Lord and Savior to “take . . . him that is weak, . . . that he may become strong also” (D&C 84:106).

I bear humble witness that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God, that the Book of Mormon is scripture, that President Gordon B. Hinckley is indeed a prophet of God, that Jesus Christ is the Redeemer and the Good Shepherd, and that He lives. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

The prophet Jacob answered these questions in the following scripture: “The Spirit speaketh the truth and lieth not. Wherefore, it speaketh of things as they really are, and of things as they really will be.”²

But what are “things as they really are” as referred to by Jacob? Elder Neal A. Maxwell, addressing this subject, has said:

“Without the obedient response to ‘things as they really are,’ there are the endless detours and the empty searches for another course of life. . . . A course of life that is wrong now cannot and will not be proven right later on.”

“The gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ gives us many truths . . . —that there really is the living God; there really is the living Church; there really are living prophets; there really are living scriptures; and there really will be a resurrection with a judgment.”³

Standards and truths

There are certain truths, certain “things as they really are,” that are enforced by standards—many of which can be mea-

sured. Let's look at several examples in athletics.

The cover of the March 2004 *New Era* shows a picture of Moroni Rubio of Mexico. Two years ago, at age 16, he took first place at the Central American Junior Championships in the 100-meter sprint. His current best time is 10.46 seconds.⁴ He would be timed by a stopwatch, which measures performance.

The men's world record for high jump is held by a Cuban athlete who jumped approximately 8 feet (2.4 m). Can you imagine jumping that high? High jumpers leap over a horizontal bar resting on two vertical poles. This bar represents a standard, a measure to meet or exceed.

Imagine holding a track meet where the runners are not measured by a stopwatch or where the high jumpers do not have a horizontal bar to measure their jumps.

In life, as in athletics, there are standards, or measured behavior. There are rights and wrongs. As priesthood holders, we do not high jump without a horizontal bar.

Unfortunately we are seeing the removal of traditional standards of morality and behavior in today's world. The vernacular of today is "anything goes." The world views time-honored standards as old-fashioned or out-of-date.

We belong to a church where adhering to standards is expected. Things that have always been wrong in the past are still wrong today. The Church does not modify standards of morality by adapting to changing customs or to the mores of the societies in which we live.

President Gordon B. Hinckley tells of an experience he had as a boy lying in the bed of an old farm wagon at night with his brother Sherman. They "looked at the myriads of stars in the heavens, and took turns picking out familiar stars and tracing the Big Dipper, the handle and the cup, to find the North Star." President Hinckley said he was fascinated by the North Star.

Regardless of the earth's rotation, the North Star maintained its position in the heavens and never moved. He said: "I recognized it as a constant in the midst of change. It was something that could always be counted on, something that was dependable, an anchor in what otherwise appeared to be a moving and unstable firmament."⁵

Noting the unwavering, absolute position of the North Star, one writer told the contrasting story of a young boy who became lost on a camping trip. When his father finally found him, his father asked if he had remembered to pick out something in the landscape that he could always see. This, his father said, would have helped him to fix a steady position. The boy said, "I did."

"What was it?" the father asked.

"That rabbit over there," the boy said.⁶

Young men of the Aaronic Priesthood, fix your gaze on the unchanging standards of the gospel and not on the moving rabbit.

Standards in *For the Strength of Youth*

In the *For the Strength of Youth* booklet, the following standards, among others, are like a North Star to you: choose friends with high standards, do not disfigure your body with tattoos or body piercings, avoid pornography, do not listen to music that contains offensive language, do not use profanity, date only those who have high standards, remain sexually pure, repent as necessary, be honest, keep the Sabbath day holy, pay tithing, and keep the Word of Wisdom.⁷

A dozen years ago, in one of the countries of Africa, we had faithful members of the Church who had been meeting in their homes for several years. I went to that country to see if we could receive permission from the government to bring in missionaries and establish the Church. I met with a high-ranking government minister. He gave me 20 minutes to explain our position.

When I finished he said, “I do not see where anything you have told me is any different from what is currently available in our country. I see no reason to approve your request to bring missionaries into our country.”

He stood up to usher me out of his office. I was panic-stricken. I had failed. In a moment our meeting would be over. What could I do? I offered a silent prayer.

Then I had an inspired thought. I said to the minister, “Sir, if you will give me five more minutes, I would like to share one other thought with you. Then I will leave.” He kindly consented.

I reached for my wallet and removed this small *For the Strength of Youth* booklet, which I have always carried.

I said, “This is a little booklet of standards we give to all of the youth in our Church.”

I then read some of the standards I have mentioned tonight. When I finished he said, “You mean to tell me you expect the youth of your church to live these standards?”

“Yes,” I replied, “and they do.”

“That is amazing,” he said. “Could you send me some of these booklets so that I could distribute them to the youth of my church?”

I replied, “Yes,” and I did.

Several months later we received official approval from the government of that country to come and establish the Church.

Standards are for your eternal security

Young men, these standards you are privileged to keep are truly a pearl of great price. The world does not understand them. Many good people seek them. You have them.

The Prophet Joseph Smith received a revelation that establishes how we may know today which voices to listen to—what standards to follow. In this revelation, our time, or generation, was referred to as a time when men would “see an over-

flowing scourge” and “a desolating sickness [would] cover the land.”⁸

The Lord then gave the standard of safety that will protect faithful followers. He said, “But my disciples shall stand in holy places, and shall not be moved.”⁹

The Brethren of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles are disciples who stand in holy places. They are not moved or swayed by changing times from what has been established as true in all prior generations. The standards of the Church are firm and true. They are for your safety and eternal security. When you commit to live them, you are measured against time-proven standards that are approved by God.

Now, my grandsons and dear brethren of the Aaronic Priesthood, you are in a race for life. It is not a brief sprint. It is more like a marathon.

You will be tested and proven against God’s established standards. You will be guided by the Spirit to help you know what to do.

We are almost the only organization left that has established, time-honored standards. Most others have succumbed to the culture of our world. How blessed we are to have living prophets.

May you be blessed as you keep the standards of the Church. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. *For the Strength of Youth* (pamphlet, 2001), 2.
2. Jacob 4:13.
3. *Things as They Really Are* (1978), xii, xi.
4. See Adam C. Olson, “Moroni’s Feet,” *New Era*, Mar. 2004, 20–23.
5. See Sheri L. Dew, *Go Forward with Faith: The Biography of Gordon B. Hinckley* (1996), 5–6.
6. See Jerry Johnston, “Following True North Is Lifelong Challenge,” *Deseret Morning News*, Feb. 14, 2004, E1.
7. See *For the Strength of Youth*, 12–37.
8. Doctrine and Covenants 45:31.
9. Doctrine and Covenants 45:32.

President Faust

It will now be my pleasure to address you. Following my remarks, the choir and congregation will then sing “Praise to the

Man.” At the conclusion of the singing, President Thomas S. Monson, First Counselor in the First Presidency, will address us.

President James E. Faust

Choices determine our happiness

My beloved brethren of the holy priesthood of God all over the world, I greet each of you in the spirit of love and fellowship.

In this life we have to make many choices. Some are very important choices. Some are not. Many of our choices are between good and evil. The choices we make, however, determine to a large extent our happiness or our unhappiness, because we have to live with the consequences of our choices. Making perfect choices all of the time is not possible. It just doesn't happen. But it is possible to make good choices we can live with and grow from. When God's children live worthy of divine guidance, they can become “free forever, knowing good from evil; to act for themselves and not to be acted upon.”¹

A young man yields to peer pressure

Sometimes we make poor choices when we yield to peer pressure. Kieth Merrill had such an experience when he was a young man. He and his friends were diving from sheer rock walls at the East Canyon Reservoir, northeast of Salt Lake City. It inevitably turned into a teenage contest when one young man climbed up to the top of the dam and dived 50 feet into the deep water of the reservoir. The rest of the young men all went to the top of the dam and made the same high dive. One boy wasn't satisfied with that, so he said, “All right, I'll do one better!” He climbed 60 feet up the side of the cliff. Not

wanting to be outdone, Kieth climbed up beside him. After the other boy had dived into the water and seemed to be all right, Kieth took courage and made his dive. The contest was now down to these two boys. Kieth's friend then climbed up to 70 feet and dived. He came up from the water laughing, rubbing his shoulders and his eyes. He then challenged Kieth, “Well, are you going to do it?”

“Of course I'm going to do it!” And everybody on the shore said, “Of course he's going to do it!”

So Kieth swam back to the shore and climbed up the rocks. He knew if he jumped from the same height of 70 feet that his friend would want to go higher, so he scrambled up 80 feet to the very top of the cliff. No one could go any higher than the top. As Kieth looked down, he was terrified to see the water so very far away. He had made a rash decision. It was not what he wanted to do nor what he felt was right. Instead he had based his decision on the prodding and dares of a half dozen young men whose names he cannot now even remember.

He backed up and ran as hard as he could toward the edge. He found the mark he had carefully laid at the edge of the rock and sprang out into space. On the way down he remembered his parents teaching him to be careful when making decisions because a wrong one could kill him. And now he thought, “You have done it, because when you hit the water you'll be going so fast that it might as well be concrete.” When he hit the water, it even felt like concrete. How grateful he was when his head finally popped above water.

Why did he jump? What was he trying to prove? The young men who dared him didn't care and probably don't even remember that foolish act. But Kieth realized afterward that he had made what could easily have been a fatal decision. He had yielded to the pressure of friends expecting him to do what he didn't want to do. He knew better. He said:

"I was living in the world, and at that moment I was of the world because I was not in control of myself. I was not making decisions about my own life. The world made the decisions for me, . . . and [I] had barely avoided being in the world about six feet deep."²

It takes a certain kind of courage to stand back rather than leaping forward, foolishly allowing someone else to make our choices for us. We can more readily take firm stands when we have a clear idea of our identity as sons of God and bearers of the holy priesthood, having a bright potential for a meaningful future.

Repent of unwise choices

Unfortunately some of our poor choices are irreversible, but many are not. Often we can change course and get back on the right track. Getting back on the right track may involve the principles of repentance: first, recognizing the error of our ways; second, forsaking the wrongful conduct; third, never repeating it; and, fourth, confessing³ and making restitution where possible. Learning by experience has value, but the "school of hard knocks" is deserving of its name. Progression comes faster and easier by learning from our parents, those who love us, and our teachers. We can also learn from the mistakes of others, observing the consequences of their wrong choices.

Varieties of important choices

Some choices present good opportunities no matter which road we take—for ex-

ample, when deciding which career path to follow or which school to attend. I know one bright and able young man who wanted to become a doctor, but the opportunity did not open up for him, so he chose to follow the law. He has become a very successful lawyer, but I am satisfied he would have been equally successful as a doctor.

Some of our important choices have a time line. If we delay a decision, the opportunity is gone forever. Sometimes our doubts keep us from making a choice that involves change. Thus an opportunity may be missed. As someone once said, "When you have to make a choice and don't make it, that in itself is a choice."⁴

Some people find it hard to make a decision. A psychiatrist once said to a patient, "Do you ever have any trouble making up your mind?" The patient said, "Well, yes and no." My hope and prayer is that we can be as resolute as Joshua when he proclaimed, "Choose you this day whom ye will serve; . . . but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."⁵

Some choices have greater consequences than others. We make no greater voluntary choice in this life than the selection of a marriage partner. This decision can bring eternal happiness and joy. To find sublime fulfillment in marriage, both partners need to be fully committed to the marriage.

Make some choices only once

Some important choices for fulfillment and happiness should be made only once and then, having been made, never have to be made again. For example, we need only once to make the firm and unequivocal resolution not to smoke tobacco, drink alcoholic drinks, or use mind-changing drugs.

In 1976, Elder Robert C. Oaks, then a colonel in the United States Air Force, was a member of the Incidents at Sea negotiating team. They were guests at a dinner

hosted by the Leningrad Naval District. About 50 senior officers of the Soviet Union and the United States were present as the host led the group in toasts before dinner. They stood for the first toast and raised their glasses, most of which were filled with Russian vodka. Brother Oaks had pink lemonade in his glass, which was immediately noticed by the admiral leading the toast. He stopped and demanded that Brother Oaks fill his glass with vodka, stating that he would not proceed until he had done so. Brother Oaks declined, explaining that he was happy with what he had in his glass.

A significant tension began to build, and even his own team members, most of whom were senior to him, were growing uneasy over the impasse. Brother Oaks's Soviet escort hissed in his ear, "Fill your glass with vodka!" Brother Oaks uttered the shortest prayer of his life: "God, help me!"

Within seconds the Soviet interpreter, an army captain with whom he had previously discussed religion, whispered to the host admiral, "It is because of his religion." The admiral nodded his head, the tension immediately diffused, and the program moved on.⁶

Elder Oaks had decided years before that he would never drink alcohol, and so in the moment of trial he did not have to make this choice again. Elder Oaks was convinced that more harm would have come to him if he had compromised a tenet of his faith than the harm that would have come from drinking the vodka. Incidentally, adhering to his religious principles did not hurt his career. After this incident he went on to become a four-star general.

Responsibility for choices

Strangely, doing the wrong thing often seems reasonable, possibly because it seems to be the easiest course. We often

hear as a justification for wrong behavior, "Well, everybody is doing it." This evil distorts the truth, and its author is Satan. As Nephi tells us, "Thus the devil cheateth their souls, and leadeth them away carefully down to hell."⁷

No matter how many people in our society are involved, none are justified in being dishonest, lying, cheating, using profanity (especially taking the Lord's name in vain), engaging in immoral sexual relationships, or not respecting the Lord's day.

Other people's actions do not dictate what is right or wrong. One person having the courage to make the right choice can influence many others to also choose wisely. I wish to endorse what is stated in the pamphlet *For the Strength of Youth*:

"You are responsible for the choices you make. You should not blame your circumstances, your family, or your friends if you choose to disobey God's commandments. You are a child of God with great strength. You have the ability to choose righteousness and happiness, no matter what your circumstances."⁸

How to make correct choices

How do we make correct choices? A choice involves making a conscious decision. To make an intelligent decision we need to evaluate all available facts on both sides of an issue. But that isn't enough. Making correct decisions involves prayer and inspiration. The 9th section of the Doctrine and Covenants gives us the grand key. The Lord said to Oliver Cowdery:

"Behold, you have not understood; you have supposed that I would give it unto you, when you took no thought save it was to ask me.

"But, behold, I say unto you, that you must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right, and if it is right I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you; therefore, you shall feel that it is right.

“But if it be not right you shall have no such feelings, but you shall have a stupor of thought that shall cause you to forget the thing which is wrong.”⁹

As we look into the future, we are going to need to be stronger and more responsible for our choices in a world where people “call evil good, and good evil.”¹⁰ We do not choose wisely if we use our agency in opposition to God’s will or to priesthood counsel. Tomorrow’s blessings and opportunities depend on the choices we make today.

Brethren, it is my belief and testimony that collectively we have the responsibility to set the example of righteousness to all of the world. Under the great leadership of President Gordon B. Hinckley, we must point the way by the inspired choices we make. The power of choice is yours. May we all use our God-given agency wisely

as we make these eternal choices. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. 2 Nephi 2:26.
2. See “Deciding about Decisions,” *New Era*, June 1976, 12–13.
3. See Doctrine and Covenants 58:43.
4. William James, as quoted in Evan Esar, ed., *20,000 Quips and Quotes* (1968), 132.
5. Joshua 24:15.
6. See *Believe! Helping Youth Trust in the Lord* (2003), 27–28.
7. 2 Nephi 28:21.
8. *For the Strength of Youth* (pamphlet, 2001), 5.
9. Doctrine and Covenants 9:7–9.
10. 2 Nephi 15:20.

The choir and congregation sang
“Praise to the Man.”

President Thomas S. Monson

Great expectations for priesthood holders

Brethren, you are an inspiring sight to behold. It is awesome to realize that in thousands of chapels throughout the world at this hour, your fellow holders of the priesthood of God are receiving this broadcast by way of satellite transmission. Your nationalities vary, and your languages are many, but a common thread binds us together. We have been entrusted to bear the priesthood and to act in the name of God. We are the recipients of a sacred trust. Much is expected of us.

Long ago the renowned author Charles Dickens wrote of opportunities that await. In his classic volume entitled *Great Expectations*, Dickens described a boy by the name of Philip Pirrip, more commonly known as Pip. Pip was born in unusual circumstances. He was an orphan. He wished

with all his heart that he were a scholar and a gentleman. Yet all of his ambitions and all of his hopes seemed doomed to failure. Do you young men sometimes feel that way? Do those of us who are older entertain these same thoughts?

Then one day a London lawyer by the name of Jaggers approached little Pip and told him that an unknown benefactor had bequeathed to him a fortune. The lawyer put his arm around the shoulder of Pip and said to him, “My boy, you have great expectations.”

Tonight, as I look at you young men and realize who you are and what you may become, I declare, “You have great expectations”—not as the result of an unknown benefactor but as the result of a known benefactor, even our Heavenly Father, and great things are expected of you.

The call for courage is constant

Life's journey is not traveled on a freeway devoid of obstacles, pitfalls, and snares. Rather, it is a pathway marked by forks and turnings. Decisions are constantly before us. To make them wisely, courage is needed—the courage to say *no*, the courage to say *yes*. Decisions do determine destiny.

The call for courage comes constantly to each of us. It has ever been so, and so shall it ever be.

The courage of a military leader was recorded by a young infantryman wearing the gray uniform of the Confederacy during America's Civil War. He describes the influence of General J. E. B. Stuart in these words:

"[At a critical point in the battle,] he waved his hand toward the enemy and shouted, 'Forward men! Forward! Just follow me!' . . .

" . . . With courage and resolution [they followed] after him like a wide raging torrent," and the objective was seized and held.¹

At an earlier time, in a land far distant, another leader issued the same plea: "Follow me."² He was not a general of war. Rather, He was the Prince of Peace, the Son of God. Those who followed Him then and those who follow Him now win a far more significant victory, with consequences that are everlasting. The need for courage is constant.

Scriptural examples of courage

The holy scriptures portray the evidence of this truth. Joseph, son of Jacob, the same who was sold into Egypt, demonstrated the firm resolve of courage when to Potiphar's wife, who attempted to seduce him, he declared: "How . . . can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God? And . . . he hearkened not unto her . . . and got . . . out."³

In our day a father applied this example of courage to the lives of his children

by declaring, "If you ever find yourself where you shouldn't be, get out!"

Who can help but be inspired by the lives of the 2,000 stripling sons of Helaman, who taught and demonstrated the need of courage to follow the teachings of parents, the courage to be chaste and pure?⁴

Perhaps each of these accounts is crowned by the example of Moroni, who had the courage to persevere to the end in righteousness.⁵

All were fortified by the words of Moses: "Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid . . . : for the Lord thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee."⁶ He did not fail them. He will not fail us. He did not forsake them. He will not forsake us.

It is this sweet assurance that can guide you and me—in our time, in our day, in our lives. Of course we will face fear, experience ridicule, and meet opposition. Let us have the courage to defy the consensus, the courage to stand for principle. Courage, not compromise, brings the smile of God's approval. Courage becomes a living and an attractive virtue when it is regarded not only as a willingness to die manfully, but also as a determination to live decently. A moral coward is one who is afraid to do what he thinks is right because others will disapprove or laugh. Remember that all men have their fears, but those who face their fears with dignity have courage as well.

Courage of a seaman to pray

From my personal chronology of courage, let me share with you an example from military service.

Entering the United States Navy in the closing months of World War II was a challenging experience for me. I learned of brave deeds, acts of valor, and examples of courage. One best remembered was the quiet courage of an 18-year-old seaman

—not of our faith—who was not too proud to pray. Of 250 men in the company, he was the only one who each night knelt down by the side of his bunk—at times amidst the jeers of the curious, the jests of unbelievers—and, with bowed head, prayed to God. He never wavered. He never faltered. He had courage.

I love these words from the poet Ella Wheeler Wilcox:

It is easy enough to be pleasant,
When life flows by like a song,
But the man worth while is one who
will smile,
When everything goes dead wrong.⁷

Courage of Paul Tingey

Such a man was Paul Tingey. Just a month ago I attended his funeral services here in Salt Lake City. Paul grew up in a fine Latter-day Saint home and served an honorable mission for the Lord in Germany. A companion of his in the mission field was Elder Bruce D. Porter of the First Quorum of the Seventy. Elder Porter described Elder Tingey as one of the most dedicated and successful missionaries he ever knew.

At the conclusion of his mission, Elder Tingey returned home, completed his studies at the university, married his sweetheart, and together with her reared their family. He served as a bishop and was successful in his vocation.

Then, without much warning, the symptoms of a dreaded disease struck his nervous system—even multiple sclerosis. Held captive by this malady, Paul Tingey struggled valiantly but then was confined to a care facility for the remainder of his life. There he cheered up the sad and made everyone feel glad.⁸ Whenever I attended Church meetings there, Paul lifted my spirits, as he did all others.

When the World Olympics came to Salt Lake City in 2002, Paul was selected to carry the Olympic torch for a specified distance. When this was announced at the

care facility, a cheer erupted from those patients assembled and a hearty round of applause echoed through the halls. As I congratulated Paul, he said with his limited diction, “I hope I don’t drop the torch!”

Brethren, Paul Tingey didn’t drop the Olympic torch. What’s more, he carried bravely the torch he was handed in life and did so to the day of his passing.

Spirituality, faith, determination, courage—Paul Tingey had them all.

Courage to rise from failure, to try again

Someone has said that courage is not the absence of fear but the mastery of it.⁹ At times, courage is needed to rise from failure, to strive again.

As a young teenager I participated in a Church basketball game. When the outcome was in doubt, the coach sent me onto the playing floor right after the second half began. I took an inbounds pass, dribbled the ball toward the key, and let the shot fly. Just as the ball left my fingertips, I realized why the opposing guards did not attempt to stop my drive: I was shooting for the wrong basket! I offered a silent prayer: “Please, Father, don’t let that ball go in.” The ball rimmed the hoop and fell out.

From the bleachers came the call, “We want Monson, we want Monson, we want Monson—*out!*” The coach obliged.

Many years later, as a member of the Council of the Twelve, I joined other General Authorities in visiting a newly completed chapel where, as an experiment, we were trying out a tightly woven carpet on the gymnasium floor.

While several of us were examining the floor, Bishop J. Richard Clarke, who was then in the Presiding Bishopric, suddenly threw the basketball to me with a challenge: “I don’t believe you can hit the basket, standing where you are!”

I was some distance behind what is now the professional three-point line. I had never made such a basket in my entire life. Elder Mark E. Petersen of the Twelve called out to the others, “I think he can!”

My thoughts returned to my embarrassment of years before, shooting toward the wrong basket. Nevertheless, I aimed and let that ball fly. Through the net it went!

Throwing the ball in my direction, Bishop Clarke once more issued the challenge: "I know you can't do that again!"

Elder Petersen spoke up, "Of course he can!"

The words of the poet echoed in my heart:

Lead us, O lead us,
Great Molder of men,
Out of the shadow
To strive once again.¹⁰

I shot the ball. It soared toward the basket and went right through.

That ended the inspection visit.

At lunchtime, Elder Petersen said to me, "You know, you could have been a starter in the NBA."

Be worthy to receive divine help

Winning or losing in basketball fades from our thoughts when we contemplate our duties as bearers of the priesthood of God—both the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthood. We have a solemn duty to prepare ourselves through compliance with the commandments of the Lord and in responding to the calls we receive to serve Him.

We who have been ordained to the priesthood of God can make a difference. When we qualify for the help of the Lord, we can build boys, we can mend men, we can accomplish miracles in His holy service. Our opportunities are without limit.

Though the task seems large, we are strengthened by the truth "The greatest force in this world today is the power of God as it works through man." If we are on the Lord's errand, we are entitled to the Lord's help. That divine help, however, is predicated upon our worthiness. To sail safely the seas of mortality, to perform a

human rescue mission, we need the guidance of that eternal mariner, even the great Jehovah. We look up, we reach out to obtain heavenly help.

Are our reaching hands clean? Are our yearning hearts pure? Looking backward in time through the pages of history, we find a lesson on worthiness gleaned from the words of the dying King Darius. Through proper rites, Darius had been recognized as legitimate king of Egypt. His rival, Alexander the Great, had been declared legitimate son of Amon. He too was Pharaoh. Alexander, finding the defeated Darius on the point of death, laid his hands upon his head to heal him, commanding him to arise and resume his kingly power, concluding, "I swear unto thee, Darius, by all the gods that I do these things truly and without faking." Darius replied with a gentle rebuke: "Alexander my boy . . . do you think you can touch heaven with those hands of yours?"¹¹

A mother's faith in her son

Brethren, as we learn our duty and magnify the callings which have come to us, the Lord will guide our efforts and touch the hearts of those whom we serve.

Many years ago I would visit an older widow named Mattie, whom I had known for many years and whose bishop I had been. My heart grieved at her utter loneliness. A precious son of hers lived many miles away, and for years he had not visited his mother. Mattie spent long hours in a lonely vigil at her front window. Behind a frayed and frequently opened curtain, the disappointed mother would say to herself, "Dick will come; Dick will come."

But Dick didn't come, and the years passed by one after another. Then, like a ray of sunshine, Church activity came into the life of Dick, one of my former Aaronic Priesthood boys, who now lived in Houston, Texas, far away from his mother. He journeyed to Salt Lake to visit with me. He telephoned upon his arrival and, with

excitement, reported the change in his life. He asked if I had time to see him if he were to come directly to my office. My response was one of gladness. However, I said, "Dick, first visit your mother and then come to see me." He gladly complied with my request.

Before he could get to my office, there came a phone call from Mattie, his mother. From a joyful heart came words punctuated by tears: "Bishop, I knew Dick would come. I told you he would. I saw him coming through the window."

Not many years later at Mattie's funeral, Dick and I spoke tenderly of that experience. We had witnessed a glimpse of God's healing power through the window of a mother's faith in her son.

Time marches on. Duty keeps cadence with that march. Duty does not dim nor diminish. Catastrophic conflicts come and go, but the war waged for the souls of men continues without abatement. Like a clarion call comes the word of the Lord to you, to me, and to priesthood holders everywhere: "Wherefore, now let every man learn his duty, and to act in the office in which he is appointed, in all diligence."¹²

May we each have the courage to do so, I pray, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. In Emory M. Thomas, *Bold Dragoon: The Life of J. E. B. Stuart* (1986), 211–12.
2. Matthew 4:19.
3. Genesis 39:9–10, 12.

4. See Alma 56.
5. See Moroni 1–10.
6. Deuteronomy 31:6.
7. "Worth While," in *The Best-Loved Poems of the American People*, sel. Hazel Felleman (1936), 144.
8. See "Have I Done Any Good?" *Hymns*, no. 223.
9. See Mark Twain, in Gorton Carruth and Eugene Ehrlich, eds., *The Harper Book of American Quotations* (1988), 111.
10. From the "Alma Mater" of Yonkers High School.
11. See Hugh Nibley, *Abraham in Egypt* (1981), 192.
12. Doctrine and Covenants 107:99.

President Faust

We remind you that the Tabernacle Choir broadcast will be from 9:30 to 10:00 tomorrow morning. The Sunday morning session will immediately follow.

Daylight saving time begins tomorrow at 2:00 a.m. We encourage you to move your clocks ahead one hour before you retire this evening.

We express appreciation to the priesthood choir from the Salt Lake Valley and Orem institutes for the beautiful music they have provided this evening.

President Gordon B. Hinckley, our beloved prophet, will be our concluding speaker at this session. Following President Hinckley's remarks, the choir will sing "Redeemer of Israel." The benediction will then be offered by Elder Craig C. Christensen of the Seventy.

President Gordon B. Hinckley

Significance of the Church welfare plan

I've just been thinking of what would happen if I forgot to turn my clock forward.

In 1936, 68 years ago, one of the secretaries to the Quorum of the Twelve told me what a member of the Twelve had told

her. She said that in the coming general conference there would be announced a program which would come to be recognized as even more noteworthy than the coming of our people to these valleys as pioneers.

Now, parenthetically, you should not tell your secretary what you should keep confidential, and she should not tell anyone else when she is given confidential information.

But that was what happened back then. It never happens today. Oh no! I should add that my able secretaries are never guilty of such a breach of confidentiality.

As you who are acquainted with the history know, there was announced at that time the Church security plan, the name of which was subsequently changed to the Church welfare program.

I wondered back in those days how anything the Church did could eclipse in anyone's judgment the historic gathering of our people to these western valleys of the United States. That was a movement of such epic proportions that I felt nothing could ever be so noteworthy. But I have discovered something of interest in the last short while.

We receive many prominent visitors in the office of the First Presidency. They include heads of state and ambassadors of nations. A few weeks ago we entertained the mayor of one of the great cities of the world. We have likewise recently entertained the vice president and the ambassador of Ecuador, the ambassador from Lithuania, the ambassador from Belarus, and others. In our conversations, not one of these visitors mentioned the great pioneer journey of our forebears. But each of them, independently, spoke in high praise of our welfare program and our humanitarian efforts.

And so as I speak in this great priesthood meeting, I wish to say a few words concerning our efforts in behalf of those in need, be they members of the Church or otherwise, in various parts of the world.

Program has served thousands in need

When the modern welfare program was put in motion, it was designed to take care of the needs of our own people. In the years that have followed, thousands

upon thousands have been served. Bishops and Relief Society presidents have had available to them food and clothing and other supplies for those in need. Numberless members of the Church have worked in volunteer capacities in producing that which was required. We now operate 113 storehouses, 63 farms, 105 canneries and home storage centers, 18 food processing and distribution plants, as well as many other facilities.

Not only have the needs of Church members been met, but aid has been extended to countless others. Right here in this Salt Lake City community, many of the hungry are fed daily by non-LDS agencies utilizing LDS welfare supplies.

Here, in this city, and in a number of other places, we operate beautiful stores where there is no cash register, where no money changes hands, where food, clothing, and other necessities are provided to those in distress. I believe that no better milk, no better meat, and no better flour is found on any grocery shelf than that which is distributed from the bishops' storehouses.

Principles of Church welfare

The principles on which these establishments operate are essentially what they were at the beginning.

Those in need are expected to do all they can to provide for themselves. Then families are expected to assist in taking care of their less-fortunate members. And then the resources of the Church are made available.

We believe in and take very seriously the words of our Lord:

"Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:

"For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in:

"Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me" (Matthew 25:34–36).

This is the Lord's way of caring for those in need which, He declared, "ye have . . . always with you" (Matthew 26:11).

Those who are able voluntarily work to provide for those who are not able. Last year there were 563,000 days of donated labor in welfare facilities. That is the equivalent of a man working eight hours a day for 1,542 years.

Service in an Idaho community

A recent issue of the *Church News* carried the story of a group of farmers in a small Idaho community. May I read briefly from that account?

"It is 6 a.m. in late October, and frost already hangs in the air over the sugar beet fields of Rupert, Idaho.

"The long arms of the 'beeters' stretch out over twelve rows, slicing the tops off sugar beets. Behind them, the harvesters thrust their steel fingers into the soil and scoop up the beets, pulling them up toward a belt and into a waiting truck.

"... This is the Rupert Idaho Welfare Farm, and those who are working here today are volunteers. . . . At times more than 60 machines [are] working in harmony together— . . . all owned by local farmers."

The work goes on throughout the day.

"[At] 7 p.m. . . . the sun has set, leaving the land dark and cold once again. The farmers head home, exhausted and happy.

"They have finished well another day.

"They have harvested the Lord's sugar beets" (Neil K. Newell, "A Harvest in Idaho," *Church News*, Mar. 20, 2004, 16).

Such remarkable volunteer service goes on constantly to assure supplies for the storehouses of the Lord.

Preparing for catastrophe

Since the early beginnings, the program has moved beyond caring for the needy to the encouragement of preparedness on the part of families of the Church. No one knows when catastrophe might

strike—or sickness, or unemployment, or a disabling accident.

Last year the program helped families store 18 million pounds of basic foods against a possible time of need. Hopefully that time will never come. But the good, wholesome, basic food so stored brings peace of mind and also the satisfaction of obedience to counsel.

Humanitarian aid

Now there has been added another element. It began some years ago when drought in Africa brought hunger and death to uncounted numbers. Members of the Church were invited to contribute to a great humanitarian effort to meet the needs of those terribly impoverished people. Your contributions were numerous and generous. The work has continued because there are other serious needs in many places. The outreach of this aid has become a miracle. Millions of pounds of food, medical supplies, blankets, tents, clothing, and other materials have staved off famine and desolation in various parts of the world. Wells have been dug; crops have been planted; lives have been saved. Let me give you an example.

Neil Darlington is a chemical engineer who worked for a large industrial company in Ghana. Eventually he retired.

He and his wife were then called as a missionary couple. They were sent to Ghana. Brother Darlington says, "In areas of famine, disease, and social unrest, we were there as representatives of the Church, extending a helping hand to the destitute, the hungry, the distressed."

In small villages they drilled new wells and repaired old ones. Those of us who have fresh, clean water in abundance can scarcely appreciate the circumstances of those who are without.

Can you picture this couple, devoted Latter-day Saint missionaries? They drill into the dry earth. Their drill reaches the water table below, and the miracle liquid

comes to the surface and spills over the dry and thirsty soil. There is rejoicing. There are tears. There is now water to drink, water with which to wash, water to grow crops. There is nothing more treasured in a dry land than water. How absolutely beautiful is water pouring from a new well.

On one occasion, when the tribal chiefs and the elders of the village gathered to thank them, Brother Darlington asked the chief if he and Sister Darlington could sing a song for them. They looked into the eyes of the dark-skinned men and women before them and sang "I Am a Child of God" as an expression of their common brotherhood.

This one couple, through their efforts, have provided water for an estimated 190,000 people in remote villages and refugee camps. Contemplate, if you will, the miracle of this accomplishment.

Service throughout the world

And now, literally thousands of their kind—married couples, couples who otherwise might simply have lived out their lives in largely idle pursuits—have served and are serving in scores of ways and in scores of places. They have worked and continue to work in the impoverished areas of America. They have worked, and still do so, in India and Indonesia, in Thailand and Cambodia, in Russia and the Baltic nations. And so the work expands.

Joining with others, the Church has recently provided wheelchairs for some 42,000 disabled persons. Think of what this means to people who literally have had to crawl to get about. With the aid of selfless doctors and nurses, neonatal resuscitation training was provided to nearly 19,000 professionals in the year 2003 alone. The lives of thousands of babies will be spared as a consequence.

Last year some 2,700 individuals were treated for eye problems, and 300 local practitioners were trained in sight-saving

procedures. The blind have literally been made to see.

Where devastating floods have come, where earthquakes have created disaster, where hunger has stalked the land, wherever want has been created by whatever cause, representatives of the Church have been there. Some 98 million dollars in cash and in-kind assistance have been distributed in the past year, bringing such aid to a total of 643 million dollars in just 18 years.

I have been a firsthand witness to the effectiveness of our humanitarian efforts. In traveling the world, I have seen the recipients of your generosity. In 1998 I visited the areas of Central America which had been ravaged by Hurricane Mitch. Here the distribution of food and clothing was quickly organized, and the cleaning and rebuilding of devastated homes and shattered lives was a miracle to behold.

There is not time to go on recounting the reach of these great and significant programs. In extending help we have not asked whether those affected belong to the Church, for we know that each of earth's children is a child of God worthy of help in time of need. We have done what we have done largely with the left hand not knowing what the right hand is doing. We seek no commendation or thank-yous. It is compensation enough that when we help one of the least of these our Father's children, we have done it unto Him and His Beloved Son (see Matthew 25:40).

We shall go on in this work. There will always be a need. Hunger and want and catastrophes will ever be with us. And there will always be those whose hearts have been touched by the light of the gospel who will be willing to serve and work and lift the needy of the earth.

Perpetual Education Fund

As a correlated effort we have established the Perpetual Education Fund. It has come about through your generous

contributions. It is now operating in 23 countries. Loans are extended to worthy young men and women for education. Otherwise they would be trapped in the stagnated poverty their parents and forebears have known for generations. Some 10,000 and more are now being assisted, and experience to this date indicates that with such training they are now earning three to four times what was previously possible.

Guidance from the Lord

The Spirit of the Lord guides this work. This welfare activity is secular activity, expressing itself in terms of rice and

beans, of blankets and tents, of clothing and medicine, of employment and education for better employment. But this so-called secular work is but an outward expression of an inward spirit—the Spirit of the Lord, of whom it was said, He “went about doing good” (Acts 10:38).

May heaven prosper this great program, and may heaven’s blessing rest upon all who serve therein, I humbly pray, in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

The choir sang “Redeemer of Israel.” Elder Craig C. Christensen offered the benediction.

SUNDAY MORNING SESSION

The fourth session of the 174th Annual General Conference convened in the Conference Center at 10:00 a.m. on Sunday, April 4, 2004. President Thomas S. Monson conducted this session.

Music was provided by the Tabernacle Choir. Craig Jessop and Mack Wilberg directed the choir, and Richard Elliott was the organist. The choir sang “How Firm a Foundation” to begin the session. President Monson then made the following remarks.

President Thomas S. Monson

We welcome you this morning to this, the fourth general session of the 174th Annual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. President Gordon B. Hinckley, who presides at this conference, has asked that I, Brother Monson, conduct this session.

We extend our greetings to those of you who are participating by radio, television, the Internet, or satellite transmission. We are grateful to the owners and operators of the facilities for broadcasting this conference.

We acknowledge the presence of government, education, and civic leaders who are here with us.

The music for this session will be by the Tabernacle Choir, under the direction of Craig Jessop and Mack Wilberg, with Richard Elliott at the organ. The choir opened this session by singing “How Firm a Foundation” and will now favor us with “There Is Sunshine in My Soul Today.” The invocation will then be offered by Elder Walter F. González of the Seventy. Following the invocation, the choir will sing “How Lovely Are the Messengers.”

The choir sang “There Is Sunshine in My Soul Today.”

Elder Walter F. González offered the invocation.

The choir sang “How Lovely Are the Messengers.”

President Monson

We shall now be pleased to hear from President James E. Faust, Second Coun-

selor in the First Presidency. Elder L. Tom Perry of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles will then address us. He will be followed by Elder Dennis E. Simmons of the Seventy.

The choir and congregation will then sing “Guide Us, O Thou Great Jehovah.” At the conclusion of the singing, we shall hear from Sister Julie B. Beck, first counselor in the Young Women general presidency.

President James E. Faust

Serious consequences of missed messages

My dear brothers and sisters and friends, I greet you in the spirit of fellowship and love. We live in the marvelous age of the information highway. The amount of information sent by e-mail, fax, cellular phones, and other means is phenomenal. In fact, there is a glut of messages. The volume is so vast that it is easy to miss a vital message, and missing messages can have serious consequences.

For example, in wartime missed messages between commanders and soldiers at the front have resulted in great confusion and serious loss of life. In World War I the 308th Infantry was ordered to the front in a desperate attempt to take and hold part of the Argonne Forest at any cost. The battle was so fierce that the supporting troops on the right and the left of one battalion withdrew, and the battalion was surrounded and isolated. Because headquarters lost communication with them, they became known as the Lost Battalion.

The battalion communicated with headquarters by carrier pigeons that flew from the battalion’s location to headquarters with messages. However, as soon as these pigeons were released, they were shot down by the opposing forces. The Lost Battalion’s own artillery, not knowing where they were, opened fire on their position and inflicted heavy casualties. The battalion ran out of food and water, but they held their ground and did not surrender despite their great losses. Finally one carrier pigeon called Cher Ami, even

though it was shot, got through to headquarters carrying the message that identified the battalion’s location. The survivors of the battalion were rescued because that one crucial message got through.¹

Missing messages from God

Serious consequences result whenever we miss important messages, especially if these messages are from God. Throughout the world’s history, God has sent messages in various ways. Moses was tending his father-in-law’s sheep in the desert when he came upon “a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush.”² He was curious and wanted to know why the bush was not consumed.³ As Moses turned to see, “God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here am I.”⁴ God told him, “Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.”⁵ God chose to speak with Moses out of a burning bush. He told Moses that He had a work for him to do—specifically to bring the children of Israel out of Egypt “unto a land flowing with milk and honey.”⁶

The word of the Lord came only once through a bush that burned but was not consumed. The prophet Elijah had a different experience. He waited as “the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake: and after the earthquake a

fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice.”⁷

Messages are more commonly manifested by the still, small voice, which speaks to all of us through the scriptures, modern prophets, and personal revelation.

Sometimes we don’t want to hear messages from God. For example, the word of the Lord called Jonah to go to Nineveh and declare repentance. But Jonah ignored the message and ran away to Joppa, where he boarded a ship to Tarshish to get away from the presence of the Lord. However, the Lord caused a mighty tempest to come upon the sea. The mariners were frightened, and in an effort to appease the Lord, they threw Jonah into the sea. A great fish swallowed Jonah, and he was in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights. Jonah prayed for forgiveness and deliverance, and the fish vomited him onto dry land. The second time the word of the Lord came to Jonah, he listened and went to call the people of Nineveh to repentance.⁸

How to attune ourselves to inspiration

Some of us may need something startling, like a burning bush experience, to awaken our senses. In such an experience, the essential nature of something—a person, a situation, an object—is suddenly perceived. We understand this to be inspiration. To be able to perceive by inspiration the common and ordinary things of life in their true meaning is a special gift. Many people fail to perceive inspiration because God’s “great power . . . looks small unto the understanding of men”⁹ or because they are “less and less astonished at a sign or a wonder from heaven.”¹⁰

I learned at a young age that inspiration can come to any of us. When I was in junior high school I was taking a difficult class where most of what was being taught went over my head. One day the teacher asked me a question. I didn’t understand the question, let alone the answer. Out of

nowhere a response came into my mind, which I repeated to the teacher. It was the right answer, but I knew it had not come from me.

So how can we recognize inspiration when it comes? Enos stated, “While I was thus struggling in the spirit, behold, the voice of the Lord came into my mind.”¹¹ The voice of the spirit of revelation is not necessarily audible, but it gives divine confirmation through our thoughts and feelings. As we are told in the Doctrine and Covenants, “I will tell you in your mind and in your heart, by the Holy Ghost, which shall come upon you and which shall dwell in your heart.”¹² We must cultivate our sensitivity to that divine voice.

My first radio was a crystal set. It was hard to tune to the frequency of a particular radio station. I had to literally scratch the receiving wire whisker over the top of the rough crystal to find the right pinpoint, a little valley or peak on the crystal where the signal was received. Just a millimeter off on either side of that point and I would lose the signal and get scratchy static. Over time, with patience and perseverance, good eyesight, and a steady hand, I learned to find the signal point on the crystal without too much difficulty.

So it is with inspiration. We must attune ourselves to the inspiration from God and tune out the scratchy static. We have to work at being tuned in. Most of us need a long time to become tuned in. When I was a newly called General Authority, President Marion G. Romney, who was in his 70s at the time, told us, “I know when I am working under the Spirit and when I am not.” To be able to recognize when one is being guided by the Spirit is a supernal gift.

In terms of modern communication, crystal radio sets helped us emerge from the dark ages of communication. With advanced technology, cellular phones are used for much of the communication in our time. Occasionally, however, we find

dead spots where the signal coming to a cell phone fails. This can happen when the cell phone user is in a tunnel or a canyon or when there is other interference.

So it is with divine communication. The still, small voice, though still and small, is very powerful. It “whispereth through and pierceth all things.”¹³ But like my old crystal set, the message may be there but we fail to pick it up. Perhaps something in our lives prevents us from hearing the message because we are “past feeling.”¹⁴ We often put ourselves in spiritual dead spots—places and situations that block out divine messages. Some of these dead spots include anger, pornography, transgression, selfishness, and other situations that offend the Spirit.

Heeding messages from parents

Messages come to us individually and directly from a divine source and through our presiding officers in the Church. Also of great importance are the messages that come to us from our parents and grandparents. Parental messages may not be wanted. But with experience and the passage of time, we come to realize that inspired messages from our father and mother are messages of love. To follow parental counsel is one way of fulfilling the commandment “Honour thy father and thy mother.”¹⁵

Heeding messages from the Lord

One message missed by so many in our time is the word of the Lord commanding us to “keep [ourselves] unspotted from the world.”¹⁶ We are told that many are called “but few are chosen,” and the reason is that “their hearts are set so much upon the things of this world.”¹⁷

The Savior’s transcendent message in the Sermon on the Mount is of burning-bush importance to all of us: “But seek ye first to build up the kingdom of God, and to establish his righteousness.”¹⁸ This mes-

sage needs to penetrate into our hearts and souls. As we accept this message, we are taking our personal stand in this life. Regular temple attendance will help us to constantly seek to build up the kingdom of God. Now with 117 temples in the world, never before have so many had access to the sacred houses of the Lord.

Another very important message is the need to strengthen and safeguard our families. Far too many families are breaking up. This heartbreaking trend has an endless train of consequences. Happiness in marriage begins with husband and wife living together in love, kindness, and mutual respect, walking righteously and humbly before the Lord. It is contingent on being faithful to all vows and covenants. When families do break up for whatever reason, the parents need to try especially hard to sustain and help innocent family members.

Another vital message is that we be honest with the Lord, honest with ourselves, and honest with all others. We need to pay an honest tithe, live within our means, and save for a rainy day. Debt is bondage because “the borrower is [the] servant [of] the lender.”¹⁹ Some debt may be necessary, such as to acquire a home and get an education. The Lord’s counsel on the subject is to “pay the debt . . . [and] release thyself from bondage.”²⁰

Importance of worthiness

God gives us messages of instruction or encouragement to enable us to do His will. Often this is to prepare us for a specific task. This was the case with Moses in the message of the burning bush. We should keep our lives in order so that when we receive a burning bush type of message telling us what the Lord wants us to do, we will be able to respond. We need to be sure we are in a position to recognize it and pursue it.

In our day we are bombarded by messages from many sources, both profane and spiritual. How can we determine the ones

that are most vital to us? I suggest that we may look at the source of the messages and the motivation behind them. The Lord has given us a guide through the prophet Alma: “Whatsoever is good cometh from God, and whatsoever is evil cometh from the devil.”²¹ We must strive to be worthy so that we do not miss the profound messages that come from God. Ultimately these messages include the sum total of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Heeding messages from living prophets

It has been my great privilege to have met and had some acquaintance with more than half of the Presidents of the Church since the Prophet Joseph. I met President Heber J. Grant when I was a priest in the Aaronic Priesthood. I felt a love for him, as I have for all of the Presidents since. I have wanted to live in harmony with their counsel.

In the nine years that President Thomas S. Monson and I have served as counselors to President Gordon B. Hinckley, I have come to know and feel absolutely and unequivocally that President Hinckley is the inspired President and prophet for our time. I testify that he has known and received and will continue to

receive the mind and will of the Lord for this people and the whole world. We should always be looking for and heeding the prophetic messages that come from the current President of the Church. That we may do so, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. See Buck Private McCollum, *History and Rhymes of the Lost Battalion* (1939).
2. Exodus 3:2.
3. See Exodus 3:3.
4. Exodus 3:4.
5. Exodus 3:5.
6. Exodus 3:8.
7. 1 Kings 19:11–12.
8. See Jonah 1–3.
9. Ether 3:5.
10. 3 Nephi 2:1.
11. Enos 1:10.
12. Doctrine and Covenants 8:2.
13. Doctrine and Covenants 85:6.
14. See 1 Nephi 17:45.
15. Exodus 20:12.
16. Doctrine and Covenants 59:9.
17. Doctrine and Covenants 121:34–35.
18. Joseph Smith Translation, Matthew 6:38; see also Matthew 6:33.
19. Proverbs 22:7.
20. Doctrine and Covenants 19:35.
21. Alma 5:40.

Elder L. Tom Perry

Satan's efforts centered on fathers

As we take a long, hard look at the world today, it is becoming increasingly evident that Satan is working overtime to enslave the souls of men. His main target is the fundamental unit of society—the family.

During the past few decades, Satan has waged a vigorous campaign to belittle and demean this basic and most important of all organizations. His success is becoming increasingly evident—the grim facts are

seen, reported, and heard about daily and involve the collapse of many family units. With the decay of the family, we see the terrible effects on our society—increased crime, behavior disorders, poverty, drug abuse, and the list continues to grow and grow.

It appears to me that the crosshairs of Satan's scope are centered on husbands and fathers. Today's media, for example, have been relentless in their attacks—ridiculing and demeaning husbands and fathers in their God-given roles.

Portrayals of fathers in the scriptures

It may be useful to counter the portrayal of husbands and fathers in the media with the scriptures. There we have so many great role models.

The Father and the Savior. In the New Testament we have a glimpse of the Savior's relationship with the Father. One of the most vivid of these glimpses is in the garden just before His betrayal:

"[Jesus] kneeled down, and prayed,

"Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.

"And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him."¹

Moses and Jethro. We have the example in Exodus of Jethro, Moses's father-in-law, observing how he was governing the children of Israel:

"And when Moses' father in law saw all that he did to the people, he said, What is this thing that thou doest to the people? why sittest thou thyself alone, and all the people stand by thee from morning unto even?

"And Moses said unto his father in law, Because the people come unto me to enquire of God: . . .

"And Moses' father in law said unto him, The thing that thou doest is not good.

"Thou wilt surely wear away, both thou, and this people that is with thee: for this thing is too heavy for thee; thou art not able to perform it thyself alone."²

Then Jethro taught Moses how to delegate this responsibility by calling able men who would fear God and letting them judge as rulers in Israel:

"And let them judge the people at all seasons: and it shall be, that every great matter they shall bring unto thee, but every small matter they shall judge: so shall it be easier for thyself, and they shall bear the burden with thee."³

Alma. In the Book of Mormon we have the account of Alma, the son of Alma, being numbered among the rebellious and

doing all manner of iniquity. Alma the father prayed with much faith that his son would come to a knowledge of the truth—a prayer which was answered in a very special way:

"And now it came to pass that while he was going about to destroy the church of God, . . . the angel of the Lord appeared unto them; and he descended as it were in a cloud; and he spake as it were with a voice of thunder . . . ;

"And so great was their astonishment, that they fell to the earth, and understood not the words which he spake unto them.

"Nevertheless he cried again, saying: Alma, arise and stand forth, for why persecutest thou the church of God? For the Lord hath said: This is my church, and I will establish it; and nothing shall overthrow it, save it is the transgression of my people.

"And again, the angel said: Behold, the Lord hath heard the prayers of his people, and also the prayers of his servant, Alma, who is thy father; for he has prayed with much faith concerning thee that thou mightest be brought to the knowledge of the truth; therefore, for this purpose have I come to convince thee of the power and authority of God, that the prayers of his servants might be answered according to their faith."⁴

When Alma the Younger recovered from this experience, he was a changed man.

Alternate family formations will not work

Satan, in his carefully devised plan to destroy the family, seeks to diminish the role of fathers. Increased youth violence, youth crime, greater poverty and economic insecurity, and the failure of increasing numbers of children in our schools offer clear evidence of lack of a positive influence of fathers in the homes.⁵ A family needs a father to anchor it.

Surely we have learned by now, from the experience over centuries, that the

basic family provides the most stable and secure foundation for society and is fundamental to the preparation of young people for their future responsibilities. We should have learned by now that alternate styles of family formations have not worked and never will work. This was stated plainly by the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in “The Family: A Proclamation to the World”:

“We, the First Presidency and the Council of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, solemnly proclaim that marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God and that the family is central to the Creator’s plan for the eternal destiny of His children.

“All human beings—male and female—are created in the image of God. Each is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents, and, as such, each has a divine nature and destiny. Gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose. . . .

“The first commandment that God gave to Adam and Eve pertained to their potential for parenthood as husband and wife. We declare that God’s commandment for His children to multiply and replenish the earth remains in force. We further declare that God has commanded that the sacred powers of procreation are to be employed *only* between man and woman, lawfully wedded as husband and wife. . . .

“ . . . By divine design, fathers are to preside over their families in love and righteousness and are responsible to provide the necessities of life and protection for their families. Mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children. In these sacred responsibilities, fathers and mothers are obligated to help one another as equal partners. . . .

“We warn that individuals who violate covenants of chastity, who abuse spouse or

offspring, or who fail to fulfill family responsibilities will one day stand accountable before God. Further, we warn that the disintegration of the family will bring upon individuals, communities, and nations the calamities foretold by ancient and modern prophets.”⁶

Roles of fathers

Given such urgent warnings about the future of our Father in Heaven’s children, fathers and mothers must search their souls to be certain they are following the Lord’s direction in building up eternal families. Focusing on fathers, what does the Lord expect us to do?

Once a family has been established, the father’s roles include the following:

1. The father is the head in his family.

“Fatherhood is leadership, the most important kind of leadership. It has always been so; it always will be so. Father, with the assistance and counsel and encouragement of your eternal companion, you preside in the home. It is not a matter of whether you are most worthy or best qualified, but it is a matter of [divine] appointment.”⁷

Your leadership in the home must include leading in family worship.

“You preside at the meal table, at family prayer. You preside at family home evening; and as guided by the Spirit of the Lord, you see that your children are taught correct principles. It is your place to give direction relating to all of family life.

“You give father’s blessings. You take an active part in establishing family rules and discipline. As a leader in your home you plan and sacrifice to achieve the blessing of a unified and happy family. To do all of this requires that you live a family-centered life.”⁸

As President Joseph F. Smith said: “Brethren, there is too little religious devotion, love, and fear of God, in the home; too much worldliness, selfishness, indiffer-

ence, and lack of reverence in the family, or it never would exist so abundantly on the outside. Then, the home is what needs reforming. Try today, and tomorrow, to make a change in your home.”⁹

Remember, brethren, that in your role as leader in the family, your wife is your companion. President Gordon B. Hinckley taught: “In this Church the man neither walks ahead of his wife nor behind his wife but at her side. They are coequals.”¹⁰ Since the beginning, God has instructed mankind that marriage should unite husband and wife together in unity.¹¹ Therefore, there is not a president or a vice president in a family. The couple works together eternally for the good of the family. They are united together in word, in deed, and in action as they lead, guide, and direct their family unit. They are on equal footing. They plan and organize the affairs of the family jointly and unanimously as they move forward.

2. *The father is a teacher.*

President Joseph F. Smith’s counsel applies today: “Do not let your children out to specialists . . . , but teach them by your own precept and example, by your own fireside. Be a specialist yourself in the truth.”¹²

“When you recognize the importance of teaching your children, you become humble, because at once you realize that this is accomplished by precept and example. You cannot be one thing and effectively teach another. You must live and study and pray for the constant companionship of the Holy Ghost. You must purify and organize your life so that your example and leadership reflect the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

“You must plan your day as guided by the Spirit of the Lord, earnestly seeking your own welfare and the welfare of your family before other cares blind you to these first responsibilities. As we have been taught by living prophets, ‘No other success in life can compensate for failure

in the home’ (David O. McKay, in Conference Report, Apr. 1964, 5; quoted from J. E. McCulloch, *Home: The Savior of Civilization* [1924], 42).”¹³

3. *The father is the temporal provider.*

President Ezra Taft Benson expressed it clearly: “The Lord has charged men with the responsibility to provide for their families in such a way that the wife is allowed to fulfill her role as mother in the home.” “Sometimes the mother works outside of the home at the encouragement, or even insistence, of her husband . . . [for the] convenience[s] that the extra income can buy. Not only will the family suffer in such instances, brethren, but your own spiritual growth and progression will be hampered.”¹⁴

Fathers, by divine decree, you are to preside over your family units. This is a sobering responsibility and the most important one you will ever assume, for it is an eternal responsibility. You place the family in its proper priority. It’s the part of your life that will endure beyond the grave. I testify that the following statement is true:

“The position which men occupy in the family, and especially those who hold the Melchizedek Priesthood, is one of first importance and should be clearly recognized and maintained in the order and with the authority which God conferred upon man in placing him at the head of his household.

“. . . There is no higher authority in matters relating to the family organization, and especially when that organization is presided over by one holding the higher priesthood, than that of the father. . . . The patriarchal order is of divine origin and will continue throughout time and eternity. There is then a particular reason why men, women, and children should understand this order and this authority in the households of the people of God, and seek to make it what God intended it to be, a qualification and preparation for the high-

est exaltation of His children. In the home the presiding authority is always vested in the father, and in all home affairs and family matters there is no other authority paramount.”¹⁵

Prophetic counsel about fathers

Now, I have used several quotes which I have not identified. I have done it for a purpose. They will be clearly noted in the *Ensign* and *Liahona* magazines in the coming May editions. I invite you to study them and review these conference messages. They are wonderful magazines and surely should be in every home. Then the spirit of this conference can live all year long in the pages of these magazines.

May we heed the voice of the prophets, who, from the beginning of time, have warned us about the importance of fathers in the home. May we determine more fully to fulfill our duties and responsibilities that the Lord has given to us as fathers in Zion is my humble prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Luke 22:41–43.
2. Exodus 18:14–15, 17–18.
3. Exodus 18:22.
4. Mosiah 27:10–14.
5. See David Blankenhorn, *Fatherless America: Confronting Our Most Urgent Social Problem* (1995), introduction, 25–48; David Popenoe, *Life without Father* (1996), 52–78.
6. *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102; italics added.
7. The Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, *Father, Consider Your Ways* (pamphlet, 1973); reprinted in *Ensign*, June 2002, 16.
8. *Ensign*, June 2002, 16.
9. “Worship in the Home,” *Improvement Era*, Dec. 1903, 138.
10. In Conference Report, Oct. 1996, 68; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1996, 49.
11. See Genesis 2:24.
12. *Improvement Era*, Dec. 1903, 138.
13. *Ensign*, June 2002, 14.
14. In Conference Report, Oct. 1987, 61, 60–61; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1987, 49.
15. Joseph F. Smith, “The Rights of Fatherhood,” *Juvenile Instructor*, Mar. 1, 1902, 146.

Elder Dennis E. Simmons

“But if not . . .”

As a young man, I returned home from an eighth-grade basketball tournament dejected, disappointed, and confused. I blurted out to my mother, “I don’t know why we lost—I had faith we’d win!”

I now realize that I did not then know what faith is.

Faith is not bravado, not just a wish, not just a hope. True faith is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ—confidence and trust in Jesus Christ that leads a person to follow Him.¹

Centuries ago, Daniel and his young associates were suddenly thrust from security into the world—a world foreign and intimidating. When Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to bow down and

worship a golden image set up by the king, a furious Nebuchadnezzar told them that if they would not worship as commanded, they would immediately be cast into a burning, fiery furnace. “And who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?”²

The three young men quickly and confidently responded, “If it be so [if you cast us into the furnace], our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and *he will deliver us out of thine hand.*” That sounds like my eighth-grade kind of faith. But then they demonstrated that they fully understood what faith is. They continued, “*But if not, . . . we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.*”³ That is a statement of true faith.

They knew that they could trust God—even if things didn't turn out the way they hoped.⁴ They knew that faith is more than mental assent, more than an acknowledgment that God lives. Faith is total trust in Him.

Faith is believing that although we do not understand all things, He does. Faith is knowing that although our power is limited, His is not. Faith in Jesus Christ consists of complete reliance on Him.

Mortality is a time of testing

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego knew they could always rely on Him because they knew His plan and they knew that He does not change.⁵ They knew, as we know, that mortality is not an accident of nature. It is a brief segment of the great plan⁶ of our loving Father in Heaven to make it possible for us, His sons and daughters, to achieve the same blessings He enjoys, if we are willing.

They knew, as we know, that in our premortal life, we were instructed by Him as to the purpose of mortality: "We will make an earth whereon these may dwell; And we will prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them."⁷

So there we have it—it's a test. The world is a testing place for mortal men and women. When we understand that it's all a test, administered by our Heavenly Father, who wants us to trust in Him and to allow Him to help us, we can then see everything more clearly.

His work and His glory, He told us, is "to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man."⁸ He has already achieved godhood. Now His only objective is to help us—to enable us to return to Him and be like Him and live His kind of life eternally.

Knowing all this, it was not difficult for those three young Hebrews to make their decision. They would follow God; they would exercise faith in Him. He would deliver them, *but if not*—and we know the rest of the story.

Meeting challenges with faith

The Lord has given us agency, the right and the responsibility to decide.⁹ He tests us by allowing us to be challenged. He assures us that He will not suffer us to be tempted beyond our ability to withstand.¹⁰ But we must understand that great challenges make great men. We don't seek tribulation, but if we respond in faith, the Lord strengthens us. The *but if not*s can become remarkable blessings.

The Apostle Paul learned this significant lesson and declared, after decades of dedicated missionary work, "We glory in tribulations . . . knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed."¹¹

He was assured by the Savior, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness."¹²

Paul responded: "Most gladly therefore will I . . . glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. . . . I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong."¹³ When Paul met his challenges the Lord's way, his faith increased.

Faithfulness of ancient Saints

"*By faith* Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac."¹⁴ Abraham, because of his great faith, was promised posterity greater in number than the stars in the heavens and that that posterity would come through Isaac. But Abraham immediately complied with the Lord's command. God would keep His promise, *but if not* in the manner Abraham expected, he still trusted Him completely.

Men accomplish marvelous things by trusting in the Lord and keeping His commandments—by exercising faith even when they don't know how the Lord is shaping them.

"By faith Moses . . . refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter;

"Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season;

"Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt. . .

"By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king. . .

"By faith they passed through the Red sea as by dry land. . .

"By faith the walls of Jericho fell down."¹⁵

Others "through faith subdued kingdoms, . . . obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight."¹⁶

But in the midst of all those glorious outcomes hoped for and expected by the participants, there were always the *but if not*:

"And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, . . . bonds and imprisonment:

"They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about . . . being destitute, afflicted, tormented; . . ."¹⁷

"God having provided some better things for them through their sufferings, for without sufferings they could not be made perfect."¹⁸

Our scriptures and our history are replete with accounts of God's great men and women who believed that He would deliver them, *but if not*, they demonstrated that they would trust and be true.

He has the power, but it's our test.

Have faith and do all we can

What does the Lord expect of us with respect to our challenges? He expects us to do all we can do. He does the rest. Nephi said, "For we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do."¹⁹

We must have the same faith as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

Our God will deliver us from ridicule and persecution, *but if not*. . . Our God will deliver us from sickness and disease, *but if not*. . . He will deliver us from loneliness, depression, or fear, *but if not*. . . Our God will deliver us from threats, accusations, and insecurity, *but if not*. . . He will deliver us from death or impairment of loved ones, *but if not*, we will trust in the Lord.

Our God will see that we receive justice and fairness, *but if not*. . . He will make sure that we are loved and recognized, *but if not*. . . We will receive a perfect companion and righteous and obedient children, *but if not, we will have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, knowing that if we do all we can do, we will, in His time and in His way, be delivered and receive all that He has*.²⁰ I so testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. See Guide to the Scriptures, "Faith," 80; see also Hebrews 11:1; Alma 32:21; Ether 12:6.
2. Daniel 3:15.
3. Daniel 3:17–18; italics added.
4. See Mosiah 7:33.
5. See Alma 7:20; 3 Nephi 24:6; Mormon 9:19; Moroni 8:18.
6. See 2 Nephi 11:5; Alma 12:25; Doctrine and Covenants 84:35–38.
7. Abraham 3:24–25.
8. Moses 1:39.
9. See 2 Nephi 2:27; Helaman 14:30; Doctrine and Covenants 101:78.
10. See 1 Corinthians 10:13; Alma 13:28.
11. Romans 5:3–5.
12. 2 Corinthians 12:9.
13. 2 Corinthians 12:9–10.
14. Hebrews 11:17; italics added.
15. Hebrews 11:24–27, 29–30; italics added.
16. Hebrews 11:33–34; italics added.
17. Hebrews 11:36–37.
18. Joseph Smith Translation, Hebrews 11:40.
19. 2 Nephi 25:23.
20. See Doctrine and Covenants 84:35–38.

The choir and congregation sang
"Guide Us, O Thou Great Jehovah."

Sister Julie B. Beck

A woman with a “mother heart”

I have often heard my father describe my mother as a woman with a “mother heart,” and that is true. Her mothering influence has been felt by many hundreds, perhaps thousands of people, and she has refined the role of nurturer to an art form. Her testimony of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ and strong sense of identity and purpose have guided her life.

She took longer than most women to find her husband, but during her single years she had devoted her life to progress. Though it was uncommon at the time, she was university educated and advancing in a career. Following her marriage, children arrived in quick succession, and in a short span of years she was the mother of a large family. All the knowledge she had acquired, all her natural abilities and gifts, all her skills were channeled into an organization that had no earthly bounds. As a covenant-keeping daughter of God, she had prepared all her life for motherhood.

What is a mother heart?

What is a mother heart and how is one acquired? We learn about some of those qualities in the scriptures. To paraphrase Proverbs: “Who can find a . . . woman [with a mother heart]? for her price is far above rubies. . . . She . . . worketh willingly with her hands. . . . With the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard. . . . She stretcheth out her hand to the poor. . . . Strength and honour are her clothing. . . . She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness. She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness” (Proverbs 31:10, 13, 16, 20, 25–27). A woman with a mother heart has a testimony of the restored gospel, and she teaches the principles of the gospel without equivocation. She is keeping sacred covenants made in holy temples.

Her talents and skills are shared unselfishly. She gains as much education as her circumstances will allow, improving her mind and spirit with the desire to teach what she learns to the generations who follow her.

If she has children, she is a “goodly parent” (1 Nephi 1:1) who lives and teaches standards of behavior exactly in line with the teachings of the living prophets. She teaches her “children to pray, and to walk uprightly before the Lord” (D&C 68:28). Rather than listening to the voices and partial truths of the world, she knows that gospel standards are based on eternal, unchangeable truths. She believes that to be “primarily responsible for the nurture of [her] children” is a vital, dignified, and “sacred responsibilit[y]” (“The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102). To nurture and feed them physically is as much an honor as to nurture and feed them spiritually. She is “not weary in well-doing” and delights to serve her family, because she knows that “out of small things proceedeth that which is great” (D&C 64:33).

Potential for eternal motherhood

Oh, that every girl and woman would have a testimony of her potential for eternal motherhood as she keeps her earthly covenants. “Each is a beloved . . . daughter of heavenly parents, and, as such, each has a divine . . . destiny” (*Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102). As spirit daughters of God, women “received their first lessons in the world of spirits and were prepared to come forth” on the earth (D&C 138:56). They were among the “noble and great ones” (D&C 138:55) who “shouted for joy” (Job 38:7) at the creation of the earth because they would be given a physical body with the opportunity to be proven in a mortal sphere (see Abraham 3:25). They wished to work side by side with righteous men to accomplish

eternal goals that neither can attain independently.

Female roles did not begin on earth, and they do not end here. A woman who treasures motherhood on earth will treasure motherhood in the world to come, and “where [her] treasure is, there will [her] heart be also” (Matthew 6:21). By developing a mother heart, each girl and woman prepares for her divine, eternal mission of motherhood. “Whatever principle of intelligence [she] attain[s] unto in this life, it will rise with [her] in the resurrection. And if a person gains more knowledge and intelligence in this life through [her] diligence and obedience than another, [she] will have so much the advantage in the world to come” (D&C 130:18–19).

In my experience I have seen that some of the truest mother hearts beat in the breasts of women who will not rear their own children in this life, but they know that “all things must come to pass in their time” and that they “are laying the foundation of a great work” (D&C 64:32–33). As they keep their covenants, they are investing in a grand, prestigious future because they know that “they who keep their second estate shall have glory added upon their heads for ever and ever” (Abraham 3:26).

Mothers are involved in a great work

I was recently at a park where I met a group of women with mother hearts. They were young, covenant-keeping women. They were bright and had obtained advanced degrees from respected universities. Now they were devoting their considerable gifts to planning dinner that evening and sharing housekeeping ideas. They were teaching two-year-olds to be kind to one another. They were soothing babies, kissing bruised knees, and wiping tears.

I asked one of those mothers how it came about that she could transfer her talents so cheerfully into the role of mother-

hood. She replied, “I know who I am, and I know what I am supposed to do. The rest just follows.” That young mother will build faith and character in the next generation one family prayer at a time, one scripture study session, one book read aloud, one song, one family meal after another. She is involved in a great work. She knows that “children are an heritage of the Lord” and “happy is the [woman] that hath [a] quiver full of them” (Psalm 127:3, 5). She knows that the influence of righteous, conscientious, persistent, daily mothering is far more lasting, far more powerful, far more influential than any earthly position or institution invented by man. She has the vision that, if worthy, she has the potential to be blessed as Rebekah of old to be “the mother of thousands of millions” (Genesis 24:60).

The great influence of righteous women

Covenant-keeping women who have mother hearts know that whether motherhood comes early or late; whether they are blessed with a “quiver full” of children here in mortality or not; whether they are single, married, or left to carry the responsibility of parenthood alone—in holy temples they are “endowed with power from on high” (D&C 38:32), and with that endowment they receive the promised blessings and are “persuaded of them, and embraced them” (Hebrews 11:13).

Every girl and woman who makes and keeps sacred covenants can have a mother heart. There is no limit to what a woman with a mother heart can accomplish. Righteous women have changed the course of history and will continue to do so, and their influence will spread and grow exponentially throughout the eternities. How grateful I am to the Lord for trusting women with the divine mission of motherhood. Like Mother Eve, I am “glad” (Moses 5:11) to know these things. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

President Monson

We will now be pleased to hear from President Boyd K. Packer, Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

Following Brother Packer's remarks, the choir will sing "I Know That My Redeemer Lives," with soloist Liriel Domiciano.

It will then be our privilege to hear from President Gordon B. Hinckley, our beloved prophet, who will be our concluding speaker at this session of conference.

Following President Hinckley's remarks, the choir will sing "Faith in Every Footstep." The benediction then will be offered by Elder James M. Dunn of the Seventy. The concluding session of this conference will begin at 2:00 this afternoon.

President Boyd K. Packer

We need not fear for children's future

A few weeks ago our youngest son and his wife and family stopped to see us. The first one out of the car was our two-year-old grandson. He came running to me with his arms outstretched, shouting, "Gwampa! Gwampa! Gwampa!"

He hugged my legs, and I looked down at that smiling face and those big, innocent eyes and thought, "What kind of a world awaits him?"

For a moment I had that feeling of anxiety, that fear of the future that so many parents express to us. Everywhere we go fathers and mothers worry about the future of their children in this very troubled world.

But then a feeling of assurance came over me. My fear of the future faded.

That guiding, comforting Spirit, with which we in the Church are so familiar, brought to my remembrance what I already knew. The fear of the future was gone. That bright-eyed, little two-year-old can have a good life—a very good life—and so can his children and his grandchildren, even though they will live in a world where there is much of wickedness.

They will see many events transpire in the course of their lifetime. Some of these shall tax their courage and extend their faith. But if they seek prayerfully for help

and guidance, they shall be given power over adverse things. Such trials shall not be permitted to stand in the way of their progress but instead shall act as stepping-stones to greater knowledge.

As a grandfather and as one of the Twelve, I will give you some counsel, some caution, and a lot of encouragement. I could do this much better if the grandmother in our family, my wife of 57 years, were standing beside me. Mothers know much more about life than fathers do, but I will do the best I can.

We do not fear the future for ourselves or for our children.

Warning from the Book of Mormon

We live in dangerously troubled times. The values that steadied mankind in earlier times are being tossed away.

We must not ignore Moroni's words when he saw our day and said, "Ye [must] awake to a sense of your awful situation" (Ether 8:24).

We cannot take lightly this warning from the Book of Mormon:

"The Lord in his great infinite goodness doth bless and prosper those who put their trust in him . . . , doing all things for the welfare and happiness of his people; yea, then is the time that they do harden their hearts, and do forget the Lord their

God, and do trample under their feet the Holy One—yea, and this because of their ease, and their exceedingly great prosperity.

“And thus we see that except the Lord doth chasten his people with many afflictions, yea, except he doth visit them with *death* and with *terror*, and with *famine* and with all manner of *pestilence*, they will not remember him” (Helaman 12:1–3; italics added).

Have you noticed that word *terror* in that prophetic Book of Mormon warning?

The moral values upon which civilization itself must depend spiral downward at an ever-increasing pace. Nevertheless, I do not fear the future.

World War I ended only six years before I was born. When we were children, the effects of the war were everywhere present. World War II came only 15 years later. And dark clouds were already gathering.

We had the same anxious feelings that many of you do now. We wondered what the future held for us in an unsettled world.

Protect children from spiritual diseases

When I was a boy, childhood diseases appeared regularly in every community. When someone had chicken pox or measles or mumps, the health officer would visit the home and place a quarantine sign on the porch or in the window to warn everyone to stay away. In a large family like ours, those diseases would visit by relay, one child getting it from another, so the sign might stay up for weeks.

We could not blockade ourselves inside our homes or stay hidden away to avoid those terrible contagions. We had to go to school, to employment, to church—to life!

Two of my sisters were stricken with very severe cases of measles. At first they seemed to recover. A few weeks later, Mother glanced out of the window and saw Adele, the younger of the two, lean-

ing against a swing. She was faint and weak with a fever. It was rheumatic fever! It came as a complication from measles. The other sister also had the fever.

There was little that could be done. In spite of all of the prayers of my parents, Adele died. She was eight years old.

While Nona, two years older, recovered, she had fragile health for most of her life.

When I was in the seventh grade, in a health class, the teacher read an article. A mother learned that the neighbor children had chicken pox. She faced the probability that her children would have it as well, perhaps one at a time. She determined to get it all over with at once.

So she sent her children to the neighbor's to play with their children to let them be exposed, and then she would be done with it. Imagine her horror when the doctor finally came and announced that it was not chicken pox the children had; it was smallpox.

The best thing to do then and what we must do now is to avoid places where there is danger of physical or spiritual contagion.

We have little concern that our grandchildren will get the measles. They have been immunized and can move freely without fear of that.

While in much of the world measles has virtually been eradicated, it is still the leading cause of vaccine-preventable death in children.

From money generously donated by Latter-day Saints, the Church recently donated a million dollars to a cooperative effort to immunize the children of Africa against measles. For one dollar, one child can be protected.

Inoculation from spiritual diseases

Parents now are concerned about the moral and spiritual diseases. These can have terrible complications when standards and values are abandoned. We must all take protective measures.

With the proper serum, the physical body is protected against disease. We can also protect our children from moral and spiritual diseases.

The word *inoculate* has two parts: *in*—“to be within”—and *oculate* means “eye to see.”

When children are baptized and confirmed (see D&C 20:41, 43; 33:15), we place an *eye within them*—the “unspeakable gift of the Holy Ghost” (D&C 121:26). With the Restoration of the gospel came authority to confer this gift.

The Book of Mormon gives us the key: “Angels speak by the power of the Holy Ghost; wherefore, they speak the words of Christ. . . . Feast upon the words of Christ; for behold, the words of Christ will tell you [and your children as well] all things what ye should do” (2 Nephi 32:3).

If you will accept it in your mind and cradle it in your feelings, a knowledge of the restored gospel and a testimony of Jesus Christ can spiritually immunize your children.

The family is the best protection

One thing is very clear: the safest place and the best protection against the moral and spiritual diseases is a stable home and family. This has always been true; it will be true forever. We must keep that foremost in our minds.

The scriptures speak of “the shield of faith wherewith,” the Lord said, “ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked” (D&C 27:17).

This shield of faith is best fabricated in a cottage industry. While the shield can be polished in classes in the Church and in activities, it is meant to be handcrafted in the home and fitted to each individual.

The Lord said, “Take upon you my whole armor, that ye may be able to withstand the evil day, having done all, that ye may be able to stand” (D&C 27:15).

Have faith; do not be fearful

Our young people in many ways are much stronger and better than we were. They and we should not be afraid of what is ahead.

Encourage our young people. They need not live in fear (see D&C 6:36). Fear is the opposite of faith.

While we cannot erase wickedness, we can produce young Latter-day Saints who, spiritually nourished, are immunized against evil influences.

As a grandfather who has lived a long time, I counsel you to have faith. Things have a way of working out. Stay close to the Church. Keep your children close to the Church.

Study the doctrines of the gospel

In Alma’s day “the preaching of the word had a great tendency to lead the people to do that which was just—yea, it . . . had more powerful effect upon the minds of the people than the sword, or anything else, which had happened unto them—therefore Alma thought it was expedient that they should try the virtue of the word of God” (Alma 31:5).

True doctrine, understood, changes attitudes and behavior. The study of the doctrines of the gospel will improve behavior quicker than a study of behavior will improve behavior.

Put your homes in order

Find happiness in ordinary things, and keep your sense of humor.

Nona recovered from measles and rheumatic fever. She lived long enough to benefit from open-heart surgery and enjoyed years of much improved health. Others spoke of her newly acquired energy. She said, “I have a Cadillac engine in a Model T frame.”

Keep your sense of humor!

Do not be afraid to bring children into the world. We are under covenant to provide physical bodies so that spirits may enter mortality (see Genesis 1:28; Moses 2:28). Children are the future of the restored Church.

Put your homes in order. If Mother is working outside of the home, see if there are ways to change that, even a little. It may be very difficult to change at the present time. But analyze carefully and be prayerful (see D&C 9:8–9). Then expect to have inspiration, which is revelation (see D&C 8:2–3). Expect intervention from power from beyond the veil to help you move, in due time, to what is best for your family.

Remember the Atonement

Alma called the plan of salvation “the great plan of happiness” (Alma 42:8; see also 2 Nephi 11:5; Alma 12:25; 17:16; 34:9; 41:2; 42:5, 11–13, 15, 31; Moses 6:62).

Each of us came into mortality to receive a mortal body and to be tested (see Abraham 3:24–26).

Life will not be free from challenges, some of them bitter and hard to bear. We may wish to be spared all the trials of life, but that would be contrary to the great plan of happiness, “for it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things” (2 Nephi 2:11). This testing is the source of our strength.

As an innocent child, my sister Adele’s life was cruelly interrupted by disease and suffering. She and all the others so taken continue the work of the Lord beyond the veil. She will not be denied anything essential for her eternal progression.

We also lost an infant granddaughter. She was named Emma, after my mother. We receive comfort from the scriptures:

“Little children need no repentance, neither baptism. . . . Little children are alive in Christ” (Moroni 8:11–12).

Remember the Atonement of Christ. Do not despair or count as forever lost those who have fallen to the temptations of Satan. They will, after the debt is paid to “the uttermost farthing” (Matthew 5:26) and after the healing which attends complete repentance takes place, receive a salvation.

Follow Church leaders

Follow the leaders who are called to preside over you, for the promise is given: “If my people will hearken unto my voice, and unto the voice of my servants whom I have appointed to lead my people, behold, verily I say unto you, they shall not be moved out of their place” (D&C 124:45).

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints will go forward “until it has filled the whole earth” (D&C 65:2) and the great Jehovah announces that His work is done (see *History of the Church*, 4:540). The Church is a safe harbor. We will be protected by justice and comforted by mercy (see Alma 34:15–16). No unhallowed hand can stay the progress of this work (see D&C 76:3).

We are not blind to the conditions in the world.

The Apostle Paul prophesied of “perilous times” in the last days (2 Timothy 3:1), and he warned, “We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Ephesians 6:12).

Isaiah promised, “In righteousness shalt thou be established: thou shalt be far from oppression; for thou shalt not fear: and from terror; for it shall not come near thee” (Isaiah 54:14).

The Lord Himself encouraged, “Wherefore, be of good cheer, and do not fear, for I the Lord am with you, and will stand by you; and ye shall bear record of

me, even Jesus Christ, that I am the Son of the living God, that I was, that I am, and that I am to come" (D&C 68:6). In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

The choir sang "I Know That My Redeemer Lives."

President Gordon B. Hinckley

Wasn't that absolutely magnificent? Thank you, Liriel Domiciano and the choir. What a great declaration of faith—"I know that my Redeemer lives." Thank you again for that stirring and wonderful music.

May I first say to all the Church, and to others, thank you for your great kindness to Sister Hinckley and me. You have been and are so gracious and generous. We are touched by all you do for us. If all the world were treated as we are treated, what a different world it would be. We would care for one another in the Spirit of the Master, who reached out to comfort and heal.

These are perilous times

Now, my brothers and sisters, President Packer has spoken to you as a grandfather. I should like to pick up a thread from the tapestry he has woven. I too am now an old man, older even than he, if you can imagine that. I have been around for a long time, I have traveled far, and I have seen much of this world. In hours of quiet reflection, I wonder why there is so much of trouble and suffering almost everywhere. Our times are fraught with peril. We hear frequently quoted the words of Paul to Timothy: "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come" (2 Timothy 3:1). He then goes on to describe the conditions that will prevail. I think it is plainly evident that these latter days are indeed perilous times that fit the conditions that Paul described (see 2 Timothy 3:2–7).

But peril is not a new condition for the human family. Revelation tells us that "there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels,

"And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven.

"And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him" (Revelation 12:7–9).

What a perilous time that must have been. The Almighty Himself was pitted against the son of the morning. We were there while that was going on. That must have been a desperately difficult struggle, with a grand, triumphal victory.

Concerning those desperate times, the Lord spoke to Job out of the whirlwind and said: "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? . . . When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?" (Job 38:4, 7).

Why were we then happy? I think it was because good had triumphed over evil and the whole human family was on the Lord's side. We had turned our backs on the adversary and aligned ourselves with the forces of God, and those forces were victorious.

But having made that decision, why should we have to make it again and again after our birth into mortality?

I cannot understand why so many have betrayed in life the decision they once made when the great war occurred in heaven.

War between good and evil has continued

But it is evident that the contest between good and evil, which began with that war, has never ended. It has gone on, and on, and on to the present.

I think our Father must weep because so many of His children through the ages have exercised the agency He gave them and have chosen to walk the road of evil rather than good.

Evil was manifest early in this world when Cain slew Abel. It increased until in the days of Noah, "God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

"And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart" (Genesis 6:5–6).

He commanded Noah to build an ark "wherein few, that is, eight souls" would be saved (1 Peter 3:20).

The earth was cleansed. The floods receded. Righteousness was again established. But it was not long until the family of humanity, so very many of them, returned to the old ways of disobedience. The inhabitants of the cities of the plain, Sodom and Gomorrah, are examples of the depravity to which men sank. And "God [utterly] destroyed the cities of the plain" in a summary and final desolation (Genesis 19:29).

Isaiah thundered: "Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear. For your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies, your tongue hath muttered perverseness" (Isaiah 59:2–3).

It was so with the other prophets of the Old Testament. The burden of their message was a denunciation of wickedness. And the peril of those times was not peculiar to the Old World. The Book of Mormon documents that in the Western

Hemisphere the armies of the Jaredites fought to the death. The Nephites and the Lamanites also fought until thousands had died and Moroni was forced to wander alone for the safety of his own life (see Moroni 1:3). His great and final plea, directed toward those of our day, was a call to righteousness:

"And again I would exhort you that ye would come unto Christ, and lay hold upon every good gift, and touch not the evil gift, nor the unclean thing" (Moroni 10:30).

Apostasy after the Savior's death

When the Savior walked the earth, He "went about doing good" (Acts 10:38), but He also denounced the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees, speaking of them as "whited sepulchres" (see Matthew 23:27). He lashed out at the money changers in the temple, saying, "My house is the house of prayer: but ye have made it a den of thieves" (Luke 19:46). This too was a time of great peril. Palestine was part of the Roman Empire, which, in its governance, was ironfisted, oppressive, and clouded over with evil.

Paul's letters cried out for strength among the followers of Christ, lest they fall into the ways of the wicked one. But a spirit of apostasy ultimately prevailed.

Ignorance and evil enveloped the world, resulting in what is known as the Dark Ages. Isaiah predicted, "Darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people" (Isaiah 60:2). For centuries, disease was rampant and poverty reigned. The Black Death killed some 50 million people during the 14th century. Was not this a season of terrible peril? I wonder how humanity survived.

But somehow, in that long season of darkness a candle was lighted. The age of Renaissance brought with it a flowering of learning, art, and science. There came a movement of bold and courageous men

and women who looked heavenward in acknowledgment of God and His divine Son. We speak of it as the Reformation.

The dawning of a brighter day

And then, after many generations had walked the earth—so many of them in conflict, hatred, darkness, and evil—there arrived the great, new day of the Restoration. This glorious gospel was ushered in with the appearance of the Father and the Son to the boy Joseph. The dawn of the dispensation of the fulness of times rose upon the world. All of the good, the beautiful, the divine of all previous dispensations was restored in this most remarkable season.

But there was also evil. And one manifestation of that evil was persecution. There was hatred. There were drivings and forced marches in the time of winter.

It was as Charles Dickens described in the opening lines of his *A Tale of Two Cities*: “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, . . . it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair.”

Notwithstanding the great evil of these times, what a glorious season it has been and now is. A new day has come in the work of the Almighty. That work has grown and strengthened and moved across the earth. It has now touched for good the lives of millions, and this is only the beginning.

This great dawning has also resulted in a tremendous outpouring of secular knowledge upon the world.

Think of the increased longevity of life. Think of the wonders of modern medicine. I stand amazed. Think of the flowering of education. Think of the miraculous advances in travel and communication. Man’s ingenuity knows no end when the God of heaven inspires and pours out light and knowledge.

There is still so much of conflict in the world. There is terrible poverty, disease, and hatred. Man is still brutal in his inhumanity to man. Yet there is this glorious dawn. The “Sun of righteousness” has come “with healing in his wings” (Malachi 4:2). God and His Beloved Son have revealed Themselves. We know Them. We worship Them “in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). We love Them. We honor Them and seek to do Their will.

The keys of the everlasting priesthood have turned the locks of the prisons of the past.

The morning breaks, the shadows flee;
Lo, Zion’s standard is unfurled!
The dawning of a brighter day, . . .
Majestic rises on the world.

[“The Morning Breaks,” *Hymns*, no. 1]

Perilous times? Yes. These are perilous times. But the human race has lived in peril from the time before the earth was created. Somehow, through all of the darkness, there has been a faint but beautiful light. And now with added luster it shines upon the world. It carries with it God’s plan of happiness for His children. It carries with it the great and unfathomable wonders of the Atonement of the Redeemer.

How grateful we are to the God of heaven for His beneficent care of His children in providing for them, through all the perils of eternity, the opportunity of salvation and the blessing of exaltation in His kingdom, if only they will live in righteousness.

We have a great responsibility

And, my brothers and sisters, this places upon each of us a grand and consuming responsibility. President Wilford Woodruff said in 1894:

“The Almighty is with this people. We shall have all the revelations that we

will need, if we will do our duty and obey the commandments of God. . . . While I . . . live I want to do my duty. I want the Latter-day Saints to do their duty. Here is the Holy Priesthood. . . . Their responsibility is great and mighty. The eyes of God and all the holy prophets are watching us. This is the great dispensation that has been spoken of ever since the world began. We are gathered together . . . by the power and commandment of God. We are doing the work of God. . . . Let us fill our mission” (in James R. Clark, comp., *Messages of the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 6 vols. [1965–75], 3:258).

This is our great and demanding challenge, my brothers and sisters. This is the choice we must constantly make, just as generations before us have had to choose. We must ask ourselves:

Who’s on the Lord’s side? Who?
Now is the time to show.
We ask it fearlessly:
Who’s on the Lord’s side? Who?
[“Who’s on the Lord’s Side?” *Hymns*,
no. 260]

Do we really comprehend, do we understand the tremendous significance of that which we have? This is the summation of the generations of man, the concluding chapter in the entire panorama of the human experience.

Live as true followers of Christ

But this does not put us in a position of superiority. Rather, it should humble us. It places upon us an unforgiving responsibility to reach out with concern for all others in the Spirit of the Master, who taught, “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as

thyself” (Matthew 19:19). We must cast out self-righteousness and rise above petty self-interest.

We must do all that is required in moving forward the work of the Lord in building His kingdom in the earth. We can never compromise the doctrine which has come through revelation, but we can live and work with others, respecting their beliefs and admiring their virtues, joining hands in opposition to the sophistries, the quarrels, the hatred—those perils which have been with man from the beginning.

Without surrendering any element of our doctrine, we can be neighborly, we can be helpful, we can be kind and generous.

We of this generation are the end harvest of all that has gone before. It is not enough to simply be known as a member of this Church. A solemn obligation rests upon us. Let us face it and work at it.

We must live as true followers of the Christ, with charity toward all, returning good for evil, teaching by example the ways of the Lord, and accomplishing the vast service He has outlined for us.

May we live worthy of the glorious endowment of light and understanding and eternal truth which has come to us through all the perils of the past. Somehow, among all who have walked the earth, we have been brought forth in this unique and remarkable season. Be grateful, and above all be faithful. This is my humble prayer, as I bear witness of the truth of this work, in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

The choir sang “Faith in Every Footstep.”

Elder James M. Dunn offered the benediction.

SUNDAY AFTERNOON SESSION

The fifth session of the 174th Annual General Conference convened in the Conference Center at 2:00 p.m. on Sunday, April 4, 2004. President Thomas S. Monson conducted this session.

The Tabernacle Choir provided the music for this session. Craig Jessop and Mack Wilberg directed the choir, and Linda Margetts and Bonnie Goodliffe were the organists.

President Monson made the following remarks as the meeting began.

President Thomas S. Monson

We welcome you this afternoon to the fifth and concluding session of the 174th Annual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. President Gordon B. Hinckley, who presides at this conference, has asked that I, Brother Monson, conduct this session.

We extend our greetings and blessings to members of the Church and many friends everywhere who are participating

in these proceedings by radio, television, the Internet, or satellite transmission.

The music for the session will be provided by the Tabernacle Choir, under the direction of Craig Jessop and Mack Wilberg, with Linda Margetts at the organ.

The choir will open these services by singing “Let Zion in Her Beauty Rise.” The invocation will then be offered by Elder Robert F. Orton of the Seventy.

Following the invocation, the choir will sing “Oh, What Songs of the Heart.” At the conclusion of the singing, Elders M. Russell Ballard and Robert D. Hales of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles will address us. They will be followed by Elder Clate W. Mask of the Seventy.

The choir sang “Let Zion in Her Beauty Rise.”

Elder Robert F. Orton offered the invocation.

The choir sang “Oh, What Songs of the Heart.”

Elder M. Russell Ballard

A grandson’s tragic death

This past January our family suffered the tragic loss of our grandson Nathan in an airplane crash. Nathan had served in the Russian-speaking Baltic Mission. He loved the people and knew it was a privilege to serve the Lord. Three months after I officiated at his eternal marriage to his sweetheart, Jennifer, this accident took his life. Nathan’s being taken so suddenly from our mortal presence has turned each of our hearts and minds to the Atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ. While it is impossible for me to put into words the full meaning of the Atonement of Christ, I pray that I can explain what His Atonement means

to me and our family and what it might also mean to you and yours.

Reality of the Atonement

The Savior’s precious birth, life, Atonement in the Garden of Gethsemane, suffering on the cross, burial in Joseph’s tomb, and glorious Resurrection all became a renewed reality for us. The Savior’s Resurrection assures all of us that someday we too will follow Him and experience our own resurrection. What peace, what comfort this great gift is which comes through the loving grace of Jesus Christ, the Savior and Redeemer of all mankind.

Because of Him we know we can be with Nathan again.

There is no greater expression of love than the heroic Atonement performed by the Son of God. Were it not for the plan of our Heavenly Father, established before the world began, in a very real sense, all mankind—past, present, and future—would have been left without the hope of eternal progression. As a result of Adam's transgression, mortals were separated from God (see Romans 6:23) and would be forever unless a way was found to break the bands of death. This would not be easy, for it required the vicarious sacrifice of one who was sinless and who could therefore take upon Himself the sins of all mankind.

Thankfully, Jesus Christ courageously fulfilled this sacrifice in ancient Jerusalem. There, in the quiet isolation of the Garden of Gethsemane, He knelt among the gnarled olive trees, and in some incredible way that none of us can fully comprehend, the Savior took upon Himself the sins of the world. Even though His life was pure and free of sin, He paid the ultimate penalty for sin—yours, mine, and everyone's who has ever lived. His mental, emotional, and spiritual anguish were so great they caused Him to bleed from every pore (see Luke 22:44; D&C 19:18). And yet Jesus suffered willingly so we might all have the opportunity to be washed clean—through having faith in Him, repenting of our sins, being baptized by proper priesthood authority, receiving the purifying gift of the Holy Ghost by confirmation, and accepting all other essential ordinances. Without the Atonement of the Lord, none of these blessings would be available to us, and we could not become worthy and prepared to return to dwell in the presence of God.

The Savior later endured the agony of inquisition, cruel beatings, and death by crucifixion on the cross at Calvary. Recently there has been a great deal of commentary about this, none of which has made clear the singular point that no one

had the power to take the Savior's life from Him. He gave it as a ransom for us all. As the Son of God, He had the power to alter the situation. Yet the scriptures clearly state that He yielded Himself to scourging, humiliation, suffering, and finally crucifixion because of His great love toward the children of men (see 1 Nephi 19:9–10).

Gratitude for the Savior's sacrifice

The Atonement of Jesus Christ was an indispensable part of our Heavenly Father's plan for His Son's earthly mission and for our salvation. How grateful we should be that our Heavenly Father did not intercede but rather withheld His fatherly instinct to rescue His Beloved Son. Because of His eternal love for you and for me, He allowed Jesus to complete His foreordained mission to become our Redeemer. The gift of resurrection and immortality is given freely through the loving grace of Jesus Christ to all people of all ages, regardless of their good or evil acts. And to those who choose to love the Lord and who show their love and faith in Him by keeping His commandments and qualifying for the full blessings of the Atonement, He offers the additional promise of exaltation and eternal life, which is the blessing of living in the presence of God and His Beloved Son forever.

We often sing a hymn that expresses what I feel when I consider the Savior's benevolent, atoning sacrifice:

I stand all amazed at the love Jesus
offers me,

Confused at the grace that so fully he
proffers me.

I tremble to know that for me he was
crucified,

That for me, a sinner, he suffered, he
bled and died.

["I Stand All Amazed," *Hymns*, no. 193]

Jesus Christ, the Savior and Redeemer of all mankind, is not dead. He lives—the

resurrected Son of God lives—that is my testimony, and He guides the affairs of His Church today.

God is literally our Father

In the spring of 1820, a pillar of light illuminated a grove of trees in upstate New York. Our Heavenly Father and His Beloved Son appeared to the Prophet Joseph Smith. This experience began the restoration of powerful doctrinal truths that had been lost for centuries. Among those truths that had been dimmed by the darkness of apostasy was the stirring reality that we are all the spirit sons and daughters of a loving God who is our Father. We are part of His family. He is not a father in some allegorical or poetic sense. He is literally the Father of our spirits. He cares for each one of us.

Though this world has a way of diminishing and demeaning men and women, the reality is we are all of royal, divine lineage. In that unprecedented appearance of the Father and the Son in the Sacred Grove, the very first word spoken by the Father of us all was the personal name of Joseph. Such is our Father's personal relationship with each of us. He knows our names and yearns for us to become worthy to return to live with Him.

Through the Prophet Joseph Smith came the Restoration of the gospel. The Lord Jesus Christ has once again revealed, through His chosen prophet, the ordinances and the priesthood authority to administer them for the salvation of all who will believe.

God weeps over His wayward children

Another prophet in another time was shown “the nations of the earth” (Moses 7:23). “And the Lord showed Enoch all things, even unto the end of the world” (Moses 7:67). Enoch saw also that Satan “had a great chain in his hand, and it veiled the whole face of the earth with darkness;

and he [Satan] looked up and laughed” (Moses 7:26).

With all that Enoch beheld, there was one thing that seemed to capture his attention above everything else. Enoch saw God look “upon the residue of the people, and he wept” (Moses 7:28). The sacred record then has Enoch asking God over and over: “How is it that thou canst weep? . . . How is it thou canst weep?” (Moses 7:29, 31).

The Lord answered Enoch: “Behold these thy brethren; they are the workmanship of mine own hands . . . ; and unto thy brethren have I . . . also given commandment, that they should love one another, and that they should choose me, their Father; but behold, they are without affection, and they hate their own blood” (Moses 7:32–33).

Enoch saw the conditions of these latter days. He and other early prophets knew that only as we accept the Atonement in our lives and strive to live the gospel can we meet the challenges of life and find peace, joy, and happiness. Coming to understand this great gift is an individual pursuit for each child of God.

The eternal value of each soul

Brothers and sisters, I believe that if we could truly understand the Atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ, we would realize how precious is *one* son or daughter of God. I believe our Heavenly Father's everlasting purpose for His children is generally achieved by the small and simple things we do for one another. At the heart of the English word *atonement* is the word *one*. If all mankind understood this, there would never be anyone with whom we would not be concerned, regardless of age, race, gender, religion, or social or economic standing. We would strive to emulate the Savior and would never be unkind, indifferent, disrespectful, or insensitive to others.

If we truly understood the Atonement and the eternal value of each soul, we would seek out the wayward boy and girl and every other wayward child of God. We would help them to know of the love Christ has for them. We would do all that we can to help prepare them to receive the saving ordinances of the gospel.

Surely, if the Atonement of Christ was foremost in the minds of ward and branch leaders, no new or reactivated member would ever be neglected. Because every soul is so precious, leaders will counsel together to see that each one is taught the doctrines of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Atonement is for every child of God

When I think of Nathan and how precious he is to us, I can see and feel more clearly how our Heavenly Father must feel about all of His children. We do not want God to weep because we did not do all we could to share with His children the revealed truths of the gospel. I pray that every one of our youth will seek to know the blessings of the Atonement and that they will strive to be worthy to serve the Lord in the mission field. Surely many more senior couples and others whose health will permit would eagerly desire to serve the Lord as missionaries if they would ponder over the meaning of the atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. It was Jesus who said, "If . . . you should labor all your days in crying repentance unto this people, and bring, save it be *one* soul unto me, how great shall be your joy with him in the kingdom of my Father!" (D&C 18:15; italics added). Not only that, but great shall be the *Lord's joy* in the soul that repenteth, for precious unto Him is the *one*.

Brothers and sisters, our Heavenly Father has reached out to us through the Atonement of our Savior. He invites all to "come unto Christ, who is the Holy One of Israel, and partake of his salvation, and the power of his redemption" (Omni 1:26). He has taught us that it is through our

faithful adherence to gospel principles, through receiving the saving ordinances that have been restored, through continual service, and by enduring to the end that we can return to His sacred presence. What possible thing in the whole world is remotely as important as to know this?

Sadly, in today's world a person's importance is often judged by the size of the audience before which he or she performs. That is how media and sports programs are rated, how corporate prominence is sometimes determined, and often how governmental rank is obtained. That may be why roles such as father, mother, and missionary seldom receive standing ovations. Fathers, mothers, and missionaries "play" before very small audiences. Yet, in the eyes of the Lord, there may be only *one size* of audience that is of lasting importance—and that is just *one*, each *one*, you and me, and each one of the children of God. The irony of the Atonement is that it is infinite and eternal, yet it is applied individually, one person at a time.

Come to the Savior one by one

There is a level at which the child's hymn "I Am a Child of God" (*Hymns*, no. 301) harmonizes with the music of eternity. We are children of God. Each one of us is precious to the point of bringing the Lord God Almighty to a fulness of joy if we are faithful or to tears if we are not.

As the resurrected Savior said to the Nephites, so He might say to us today:

"Blessed are ye because of your faith. And now . . . my joy is full.

"And when he had said these words, he wept, and the multitude bare record of it, and he took their little children, *one by one*, and blessed them, and prayed unto the Father for them" (3 Nephi 17:20–21; italics added).

Brothers and sisters, never, never underestimate how precious is the *one*. Remember always the simple admonition of the Lord: "If ye love me, keep my com-

mandments” (John 14:15). Always strive to live worthy of the sacred, full blessings of the Atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ. In our sorrow over the separation from our dear Nathan has come the peace that only the Savior and Redeemer can give. Our family has turned to Him one by one, and we now sing with greater appreciation and understanding:

Oh, it is wonderful that he should care
for me
Enough to die for me!
Oh, it is wonderful, wonderful to me!
[“I Stand All Amazed,” *Hymns*, no. 193]

My dear brothers and sisters, may you give to others and receive for yourselves every blessing the Atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ offers, I humbly pray, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Elder Robert D. Hales

Teach children to keep commandments

As Paul prophesied, we live in “perilous times.”¹ “Satan [has been going] about, leading away the hearts of the people,”² and his influence is increasing. But no matter how evil the world becomes, our families can be at peace. If we do what’s right, we will be guided and protected.

The hymn often sung by our pioneer ancestors tells us what to do: “Gird up your loins; fresh courage take. / Our God will never us forsake.”³ That courage and faith is what we need as parents and families in these latter days.

Father Lehi had such courage. He loved his family and rejoiced that some of his children kept the Lord’s commandments. But he must have been heartbroken when his sons Laman and Lemuel “partook not of the fruit” representing the love of God. “He exceedingly feared for [them]; yea, he feared lest they should be cast off from the presence of the Lord.”⁴

Every parent faces moments of such fear. However, when we exercise our faith by teaching our children and doing what we can to help them, our fears will diminish. Lehi girded up his loins, and with faith “he did exhort [his children] with all the feeling of a tender parent, that they would hearken to his words, that perhaps the Lord would be merciful to them.” And “he

bade them to keep the commandments of the Lord.”⁵

No family has reached perfection

We too must have the faith to teach our children and bid them to keep the commandments. We should not let their choices weaken our faith. Our worthiness will not be measured according to their righteousness. Lehi did not lose the blessing of feasting at the tree of life because Laman and Lemuel refused to partake of its fruit. Sometimes as parents we feel we have failed when our children make mistakes or stray. Parents are never failures when they do their best to love, teach, pray, and care for their children. Their faith, prayers, and efforts will be consecrated to the good of their children.

The Lord’s desire for us as parents is that we keep His commandments. He has said: “[Teach] your children light and truth, according to the commandments. . . . Set in order your own house. . . . See that [you] are more diligent and concerned at home.”⁶

I want to remind all of us today that no family has reached perfection. All families are subject to the conditions of mortality. All of us are given the gift of agency—to choose for ourselves and to learn from the consequences of our choices.

Any of us may experience a spouse, a child, a parent, or a member of our extended family suffering in one way or another—mentally, physically, emotionally, or spiritually—and we may experience these tribulations ourselves at times. In short, mortality is not easy.

The gospel protects families

Each family has its own special circumstances. But the gospel of Jesus Christ addresses every challenge—which is why we must teach it to our children.

“The Family: A Proclamation to the World” states:

“Parents have a sacred duty to rear their children in love and righteousness, to provide for their physical and spiritual needs, to teach them to love and serve one another, to observe the commandments of God and to be law-abiding citizens wherever they live. Husbands and wives—mothers and fathers—will be held accountable before God for the discharge of these obligations.”⁷

Fulfilling these obligations is the key to protecting our families in these last days.

Moses counseled, “And thou shalt teach [these words] diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.”⁸ Our families should be in our thoughts continually.

Example of Moses’s mother

Moses understood the need for constant teaching, for he grew up in difficult times. At the time Moses was born, Pharaoh had declared that every Hebrew male infant in Egypt should be cast into the river. But Moses’s parents took seriously their parental duties.

The scriptures record, “By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, . . . and [his parents] were

not afraid of the king’s commandment.”⁹ When Moses grew too old to be concealed, his mother, Jochebed, constructed an ingenious basket of bulrushes, waterproofed it with slime and pitch, and placed her son inside. She directed the tiny vessel down the river to a safe place—to where the Pharaoh’s daughter bathed.

Leaving nothing to chance, Jochebed also sent along an inspired helper, her daughter Miriam, to keep watch. When Pharaoh’s daughter, the princess, found the baby, Miriam bravely offered to call a Hebrew nurse. That nurse was Jochebed, Moses’s mother.¹⁰ Because of her faithfulness, Moses’s life was spared. In time he learned who he really was, and he “forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king.”¹¹

I join with faithful parents everywhere in declaring that we know who we are, we understand our responsibilities as parents, and we do not fear the wrath of the prince of darkness. We trust in the light of the Lord.

Like Jochebed, we raise our families in a wicked and hostile world—a world as dangerous as the courts of Egypt ruled by Pharaoh. But like Jochebed, we also weave around our children a protective basket—a vessel called “the family”—and guide them to safe places where our teachings can be reinforced in the home and at church.

Ultimately we guide them to the greatest of all houses of learning—the holy temple, where one day they can kneel, surrounded by their faithful family members, to be sealed for time and all eternity to a worthy companion. What they learned from us they will teach their children, and the work of eternal families will go on.

Along the way, at times when our children are away from us, the Lord provides inspired “Miriams” to watch over them—special third-party helpers such as priesthood and auxiliary leaders, teachers, extended family, and worthy friends.

Sometimes the Spirit prompts us as parents to seek special help beyond ourselves through such resources as doctors and qualified counselors. The Spirit will direct when and how such help should be obtained.

Principles to strengthen families

But the greatest help for our families comes through the gospel—from our Heavenly Father, through the guidance of the Holy Ghost, in the doctrines and principles, and through the priesthood. May I share with you five important elements of parenting that will assist us in strengthening our families.

Hold family councils

Hold family councils. Sometimes we are afraid of our children—afraid to counsel with them for fear of offending them. There are priceless blessings to be obtained from counseling together with our families, showing a genuine interest in the lives of our family members. Occasionally family councils may involve all family members as part of a family home evening or other special gatherings. But we should regularly counsel with each of our children individually.

Without this one-on-one counseling together with our children, they are prone to believe that Dad and Mom, or Grandpa and Grandma, don't understand or care about the challenges they are facing. As we listen with love and refrain from interrupting, the Spirit will help us learn how we can be of help to our children and teach them.

For example, we may teach them that they can choose their actions but not the consequences of those actions. We can also gently help them understand what the consequences of *their* actions may be in their *own* lives.

Leave the door to our hearts open

Sometimes when our teachings aren't heeded and when our expectations are not met, we need to remind ourselves to *leave the door to our hearts open*.

In the parable of the prodigal son, we find a powerful lesson for families and especially parents. After the younger son "came to himself,"¹² he decided to go home.

How did he know his father wouldn't reject him? Because he knew his father. Through the inevitable misunderstandings, conflicts, and follies of the son's youth, I can visualize his father being there with an understanding and compassionate heart, a soft answer, a listening ear, and a forgiving embrace. I can also imagine his son knowing he could come home because he knew the kind of home that was awaiting him, for the scriptures say, "When he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him."¹³

I testify that our Heavenly Father leaves the door open. I also testify that it is never too late to open the door between us and our children with simple words such as "I love you," "I am sorry," and "Please forgive me." We can begin now to create a home they will want to return to—not only now but in the eternities.

We can also help our obedient children leave the door of forgiveness open by expressing our love and appreciation to them and by helping them rejoice in the repentance of their siblings.

Liken the scriptures unto ourselves

With the door to our hearts open, we should learn how to *liken the scriptures to our lives*.

We often talk about teaching our children from the scriptures, but how do we do that?

Several years ago I was teaching our young son about the life and experiences of the brother of Jared. Although the story was very interesting, he was not engaged. I then asked what the story meant to him personally. It means so much when we ask our children, “What does it mean to you?” He said, “You know, it’s not that different from what Joseph Smith did in the grove when he prayed and got an answer.”

I said, “You’re about Joseph’s age. Do you think a prayer like his would be helpful to you?” Suddenly we weren’t talking about a long-ago story in a faraway land. We were talking about our son—about his life, his needs, and the way prayer could help him.

As parents we have the responsibility to help our children to “lik[e] all scriptures [indeed, every part of the gospel of Jesus Christ] unto us [and unto our children], . . . for [the] profit and learning [of our families].”¹⁴

Take advantage of teaching moments

Are we likening all of our children’s gospel experiences to the real needs in their lives? Are we teaching them about the gift of the Holy Ghost, repentance, the Atonement, the sacrament, and the blessing of sacrament meeting as they meet the challenges in their lives? There is not enough time in formal meetings to teach our children everything they need to know. Therefore, we must *take advantage of everyday teaching moments*.

These moments are priceless. They come when we are working, playing, and struggling together. When they come, the Spirit of the Lord can help us know what to say and help our children accept our teaching.

Trust the Good Shepherd

What a joy and blessing to have the Spirit in our homes! And what a blessing it is to invite it through prayer, studying

the scriptures, speaking kindly, and showing appreciation to one another! Let us prepare our teaching moments by praying as Alma prayed for his son, “with much faith”¹⁵ and all the energy of our souls; by fasting, searching the scriptures, repenting of our sins, and allowing the Holy Ghost to fill our hearts with love, forgiveness, and compassion. And then it will fill our homes. Then let us *trust the Good Shepherd*.

Moses’s mother, Jochebed, guided her son down the river with faith in the “Shepherd . . . of [our] souls.”¹⁶ As parents we too can trust the Good Shepherd to guide and direct us. Isaiah promised that He “shall gently lead”¹⁷ all those who bear responsibility for the young.

He will help us trust and honor the principles of agency, opposition, and the Atonement, even when our children make unwise decisions. Through His Spirit, He will help us teach our children to meet every challenge, trial, and tribulation in life by remembering who they are—children of God. We will be inspired with ways to help them “put on the whole armour of God”¹⁸ so they can withstand the “fiery darts of the adversary”¹⁹ with the “shield of faith”²⁰ and “the sword of the Spirit.”²¹ As our children are spiritually armed and strengthened, He will bless them to endure faithfully to the end and return home, worthy to stand and live in their Heavenly Father’s presence forever.

Through it all, we will sorrow to see our family members suffer the slings and arrows of mortality. But we will stand all amazed at the love our Savior offers them. Because of Him, the buffetings need not defeat and destroy them but can soften, strengthen, and sanctify them.

Jesus Christ is mighty to save

To parents and families throughout the world, I testify that the Lord Jesus Christ is mighty to save. He is the Healer, the Redeemer, the rescuing Shepherd

who will leave the ninety and nine to find the one. If we are seeking the salvation of special “ones” in our own families, I bear testimony that they are within His reach. We assist Him in reaching them by faithfully living the gospel, being sealed in the temple, and living true to the covenants we make there.

Parents can take great comfort in the words of Elder Orson F. Whitney relating the teachings of Joseph Smith:

“The Prophet Joseph Smith declared—and he never taught more comforting doctrine—that the eternal sealings of faithful parents and the divine promises made to them for valiant service in the Cause of Truth, would save not only themselves, but likewise their posterity. Though some of the sheep may wander, the eye of the Shepherd is upon them, and sooner or later they will feel the tentacles of Divine Providence reaching out after them and drawing them back to the fold. Either in this life or the life to come, they will return. They will have to pay their debt to justice; they will suffer for their sins; and may tread a thorny path; but if it leads them at last, like the penitent Prodigal, to a loving and forgiving father’s heart and home, the painful experience will not have been in vain. Pray for your careless and disobedient children; hold on to them with your faith. Hope on, trust on, till you see the salvation of God.”²²

I bear my special witness that Jesus Christ gave His life, making possible the salvation and exaltation of all the families of the earth. With all the feeling of a ten-

der parent, I express my love and the love of our Heavenly Father to you and your family.

May we gather our loved ones around us, “gird up [our] loins; [and] fresh courage take. Our God will never us forsake.” With faith, courage, and love, families will truly be together forever. I so testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. 2 Timothy 3:1.
2. 3 Nephi 2:3.
3. “Come, Come, Ye Saints,” *Hymns*, no. 30.
4. 1 Nephi 8:35–36.
5. 1 Nephi 8:37–38.
6. Doctrine and Covenants 93:42–43, 50.
7. *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102.
8. Deuteronomy 6:7.
9. Hebrews 11:23.
10. See Exodus 2:3–10; see also Jerrie W. Hurd, *Our Sisters in the Bible* (1983), 36–37.
11. See Hebrews 11:24–27.
12. Luke 15:17.
13. Luke 15:20.
14. 1 Nephi 19:23.
15. Mosiah 27:14.
16. 1 Peter 2:25.
17. Isaiah 40:11.
18. See Ephesians 6:11, 13; see also Doctrine and Covenants 27:15.
19. 1 Nephi 15:24; Doctrine and Covenants 3:8; see also Ephesians 6:16.
20. Ephesians 6:16; Doctrine and Covenants 27:17.
21. Ephesians 6:17; see also Doctrine and Covenants 27:18.
22. In Conference Report, Apr. 1929, 110.

Elder Clate W. Mask Jr.

Traveling through mud slides

Years ago my adventurous son Jeff and I found ourselves on an old bus bouncing along on a dirt road in Central

America at 1:00 a.m. We took the early, early bus because it was the only bus that day. A half hour later, the driver stopped for two missionaries. When they got on, we asked them where in the world they

were going so early. Zone conference! And they were determined to do whatever it took to get there. At 2:00 a.m. two more elders boarded the bus and enthusiastically hugged their fellow missionaries. This scene repeated itself every half hour as the bus climbed the remote mountain road. By 5:00 a.m. we had 16 of the Lord's finest as fellow passengers and were basking in the Spirit they brought on board.

Suddenly we screeched to a halt. A massive mud slide had buried the road. Jeff said, "What do we do now, Dad?" Our friends Stan, Eric, and Allan had the same concern. Just then the zone leader shouted, "Let's go, elders. Nothing is going to stop us!" And they scrambled off the bus! We looked at each other and said, "Follow the elders," and we all sloshed through the mud slide, trying to keep up with the missionaries. There happened to be a truck on the other side, so we all hopped aboard. After a mile we were stopped by yet another mud slide. Once again the elders plowed through, with the rest of us close behind. But this time there was no truck. Boldly the zone leader said, "We will be where we are supposed to be even if we have to walk the rest of the way." Years later, Jeff told me how those missionaries and this photo inspired and motivated him tremendously as he served the Lord in Argentina.

Although we overcame the mud slides, we were spotted with mud. The missionaries were somewhat nervous about standing before their president on zone conference day when he and his wife would be carefully checking their appearance.

Becoming cleansed through Atonement

As you and I slosh through the mud slides of life, we can't help getting a few mud spots on us along the way either. And we don't want to stand before the Lord looking muddy.

When the Savior appeared in ancient America, He said, "Repent, all ye ends of

the earth, and come unto me and be baptized in my name, that ye may be sanctified by the reception of the Holy Ghost, that ye may stand spotless before me at the last day" (3 Nephi 27:20).

Alma warns us about some of the ways we become spotted with mud: "For our words will condemn us, yea, all our works will condemn us; we shall not be found spotless; and our thoughts will also condemn us" (Alma 12:14).

Alma also said:

"Ye cannot be saved; for there can no man be saved except his garments are washed white; yea, his garments must be purified until they are cleansed from all stain. . . .

". . . How will any of you feel, if ye shall stand before the bar of God, having your garments stained with blood and all manner of filthiness?" (Alma 5:21-22).

He also tells us about "all the holy prophets, whose garments are cleansed and are spotless, pure and white" (Alma 5:24).

He then asks us how we are doing as we cross through the mud slides of life: "Have ye walked, keeping yourselves blameless before God? Could ye say, if ye were called to die at this time, . . . that your garments have been cleansed and made white through the blood of Christ?" (Alma 5:27).

Because of repentance and the Atonement of Jesus Christ, our garments can be spotless, pure, fair, and white. Moroni pleads, "O then ye unbelieving, turn ye unto the Lord; cry mightily unto the Father in the name of Jesus, that perhaps ye may be found spotless, pure, fair, and white, having been cleansed by the blood of the Lamb, at that great and last day" (Mormon 9:6).

All people can come unto Christ

In 1 Samuel we read, "Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; . . . for man looketh on the out-

ward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7).

The Nephites were looking on the outward appearance of the Lamanites, for Jacob declared, "Wherefore, a commandment I give unto you, which is the word of God, that ye revile no more against them because of the darkness of their skins" (Jacob 3:9).

Our Father knows and loves His children all over the world, from Boston to Okinawa, from San Antonio to Spain, from Italy to Costa Rica. In Ghana, President Gordon B. Hinckley recently thanked the Lord "for the brotherhood that exists among us, that neither color of skin nor land of birth can separate us as Thy sons and daughters" (Accra Ghana Temple dedicatory prayer, in "Brotherhood Exists," *Church News*, Jan. 17, 2004, 11).

We invite men and women everywhere, whatever language or culture, to "come unto [Christ] and partake of his goodness; and he denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female; . . . [for] all are alike unto God" (2 Nephi 26:33).

We come to this world in many colors, shapes, sizes, and circumstances. We don't have to be rich, tall, thin, brilliant, or beautiful to be saved in the kingdom of God—only pure. We need to be obedient to the Lord Jesus Christ and keep His commandments. And we can all choose to do that regardless of where we live or what we look like.

Righteousness of the children of Lehi

When the four sons of Mosiah taught the gospel to the wild, ferocious Lamanites, a mighty change of heart occurred:

"As many of the Lamanites as believed in their preaching, and were converted unto the Lord, never did fall away.

"For they became a righteous people; they did lay down the weapons of their rebellion, that they did not fight against

God any more, neither against any of their brethren" (Alma 23:6–7).

Today many of their descendants are reading about this in their own copies of the Book of Mormon and are choosing to follow Christ. I love meeting the children of Lehi in spotless white in the numerous temples in the Mexico South Area, where I am currently serving. I feel as President Gordon B. Hinckley did at the dedication of the Guatemala City temple:

"Thou kind and gracious Father, our hearts swell with gratitude for thy remembrance of the sons and daughters of Lehi, the many generations of our fathers and mothers who suffered so greatly and who walked for so long in darkness. Thou hast heard their cries and seen their tears. Now there will be opened to them the gates of salvation and eternal life" (Guatemala City Guatemala Temple dedicatory prayer, in "Their Cries Heard, Their Tears Seen," *Church News*, Dec. 23, 1984, 4).

I have seen humble descendants of Lehi come down from the mountains to that temple and openly weep as they stood there in awe. One gave me an *abrazo* and asked me to take that hug of love, appreciation, and brotherhood back to all those beloved missionaries who brought them the gospel and to all the Saints whose tithing faithfulness has brought temple blessings within reach. Because of the Atonement of Jesus Christ, we can all stand spotless, pure, and white before the Lord.

The Savior loves us

With great gratitude I lift my voice with Nephi: "And we talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophesy of Christ, and we write according to our prophecies, that our children [and our grandchildren] may know to what source they may look for a remission of their sins" (2 Nephi 25:26).

My wife and I love this scripture so much that she painted it on a wall in our

living room, below a beautiful white porcelain *Christus*. They are a constant reminder for us to live Christ-centered lives.

One day our son was reading the scriptures with his family. Our seven-year-old grandson Clatie read, “‘And we talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ’—Hey, that’s what Granny and Grandpa have on their wall!” Now that’s one of his favorite scriptures.

On another occasion we were at the visitors’ center on Temple Square with these same grandchildren. Two-year-old Ashley was tired and wanted to leave. Sister Mask asked her if she wanted to see a big Jesus like the one on our wall. She asked, “Is He as big as me?” “Even bigger,” Sister Mask replied. When that tiny, little girl looked up at the majestic *Christus*, she ran and stood at the feet and gazed up reverently for several minutes. When her father indicated it was time to go, she said, “No, no, Daddy. He loves me and wants to give me hugs!”

The road of life is strewn with spiritual mud slides. Whatever our sins and imperfections, may we attack them with

the same missionary zeal that those elders attacked their mud slides. And may we thank our Father daily for sending us His Son, Jesus Christ, to forgive us our mud spots so that we may stand spotless before Him. Ashley was right. He does love us and will say to us at that great day, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant: . . . enter thou into the joy of thy lord” (Matthew 25:21).

I bear witness that He lives and He loves us. He is our Savior and Redeemer. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

President Monson

The choir and congregation will sing “We Thank Thee, O God, for a Prophet.” Elders W. Douglas Shumway and Bruce C. Hafen of the Seventy will then address us. Following their remarks, we shall hear from Elder Richard G. Scott of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

The choir and congregation sang “We Thank Thee, O God, for a Prophet.”

Elder W. Douglas Shumway

Today’s assault on marriage and family

Shortly after I was married, my three brothers and I were sitting in my father’s office for a business meeting. At the conclusion of our meeting, as we stood to leave, Dad stopped, turned to us, and said: “You boys are not treating your wives as you should. You need to show them more kindness and respect.” My father’s words penetrated my soul.

Today we are witnessing an unending assault on marriage and the family. They seem to be the adversary’s prime targets for belittlement and destruction. In a society where marriage is often shunned, par-

enthood avoided, and families degraded, we have the responsibility to honor our marriages, nurture our children, and fortify our families.

Honoring marriage

Honoring marriage requires spouses to render love, respect, and devotion to one another. We have been given sacred instruction to “love thy wife with all thy heart, and . . . cleave unto her and none else” (D&C 42:22).

The prophet Malachi taught: “The Lord hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou

hast dealt treacherously: yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant. . . . Therefore take heed . . . and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth” (Malachi 2:14–15). To live our life with the wife of our youth, keeping covenants, acquiring wisdom, and sharing love now and throughout eternity is a privilege indeed.

I am reminded of the expression, “When the satisfaction or the security of another person becomes as significant to one as is one’s own satisfaction or security, then the state of love exists” (Harry Stack Sullivan, *Conceptions of Modern Psychiatry* [1953], 42–43).

Marriage is meant to be and must be a loving, binding, harmonious relationship between a man and a woman. When a husband and a wife understand that the family is ordained of God and that marriage can be filled with promises and blessings extending into the eternities, separation and divorce would seldom be a consideration in the Latter-day Saint home. Couples would realize that the sacred ordinances and covenants made in the house of the Lord provide the means whereby they can return to the presence of God.

Nurturing children

Parents have been given the sacred duty to “bring . . . up [children] in the nurture . . . of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4). “The first commandment that God gave to Adam and Eve pertained to their potential for parenthood as husband and wife” (“The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102). Our responsibility, then, not only is for the well-being of our spouse but extends to the watchful care of our children, for “children are an heritage of the Lord” (Psalm 127:3). We can make the choice to nurture our children accordingly and “teach [them]

to pray, and to walk uprightly before the Lord” (D&C 68:28). As parents we must regard our children as gifts from God and be committed to making our homes a place to love, train, and nurture our sons and daughters.

President Thomas S. Monson reminds us: “The mantle of leadership is not the cloak of comfort, but the role of responsibility. . . . ‘Youth needs fewer critics and more models [to follow].’ One hundred years from now it will not matter what kind of a car we drove, what kind of a house we lived in, how much we had in the bank account, nor what our clothes looked like. But the world may be a little better because we were important in the life of a boy or a girl” (*Pathways to Perfection* [1973], 131).

Infinite worth of our sons and daughters

Although life sometimes makes us weary, impatient, or too busy for our children, we must never forget the infinite worth of what we have in our homes—our sons and our daughters. The task at hand, a business engagement, or a new automobile are all of benefit but pale in value when compared to the worth of a young soul.

John Gunther, a father who lost his young son to brain cancer, urged those who still have sons and daughters to “embrace them with a little added rapture and a keener awareness of joy” (*Death Be Not Proud: A Memoir* [1949], 259).

President Harold B. Lee told of a great educator, Horace Mann, who “was the speaker at the dedication of a . . . boys’ school. . . . In his talk he said, ‘This school has cost hundreds of thousands of dollars; but if this school is able to save one boy, it is worth all that it cost.’ One of his friends came up to [Mr. Mann] at the close of the meeting and said, ‘You let your enthusi-

asm get away with you, didn't you? You . . . said that if this school, costing hundreds of thousands of dollars, were to save just one boy, it was worth all that it cost? You surely don't mean that.'

"Horace Mann looked at him and said, 'Yes, my friend. It would be worth it if that one boy were my son; it would be worth it' " (in Conference Report, Apr. 1971, 64–65; or *Ensign*, June 1971, 61).

Loving, protecting, and nurturing our children are among the most sacred and eternally important things we will do. Worldly belongings will vanish, today's number-one movie or song will be irrelevant tomorrow, but a son or a daughter is eternal.

Cultivating family relationships

"The family is central to the Creator's plan for the eternal destiny of His children" (*Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102). Therefore parents and children must work together in unity to fortify family relationships, cultivating them day in and day out.

I have a brother who was associated with a large university. He told of a student athlete who was an outstanding hurdler. The young man was blind. Rex asked him, "Don't you ever fall?" "I have to be exact," the athlete responded. "I measure each time before I jump. One time I didn't, and I nearly killed myself." The young man then spoke of the countless hours his father had devoted over the years teaching, helping, and showing him how to hurdle until he became one of the best. How could this young man fail with a team like that—a father and a son.

Young men and women, you can be a great influence for good in your homes as you help to achieve worthy family objectives. I shall never forget the family home evening years ago in which the name of

each member of our family was placed in a hat. The name you picked from the hat would be your "secret friend" for the week. You can imagine the love that filled my heart when I came home that Tuesday after work to sweep out the garage, as I had earlier promised, and found it cleanly swept. There was a note attached to the garage door which read, "Hope you had a good day—your secret friend." And on Friday night, as I turned down my bed, I uncovered an Almond Joy, my favorite candy bar, wrapped carefully in scotch tape and plain white paper, with a note: "Dad, I love you a lot! Thanks, your secret friend." Then to top it off, after returning home from a late meeting Sunday evening, I found the dining room table beautifully set, and written on the napkin by my place were the words "SUPER DAD" in big bold letters and in parentheses, "Your secret friend." Hold your family home evenings, for this is where the gospel is taught, a testimony is gained, and the family is fortified.

The gospel guides us in our families

Although the adversary seeks to destroy the key elements necessary for a happy marriage and a righteous family, let me assure you that the gospel of Jesus Christ provides the tools and teachings necessary to combat and conquer the assailant in this war. If we will but honor our marriages by imparting more love and selflessness to our spouses; nurture our children through gentle persuasion and the expert teacher we call example; and fortify the spirituality of our families through consistent family home evening, prayer, and scripture study, I testify to you that the living Savior, Jesus Christ, will guide us and grant us victory in our efforts to achieve an eternal family unit. I so testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Elder Bruce C. Hafen

The Restoration's unique doctrine of the Atonement

In recent years we Latter-day Saints have been teaching, singing, and testifying much more about the Savior Jesus Christ. I rejoice that we are rejoicing more.

As we “talk [more] of Christ,”¹ the gospel’s doctrinal fullness will come out of obscurity. For example, some of our friends can’t see how our Atonement beliefs relate to our beliefs about becoming more like our Heavenly Father. Others *mistakenly* think our Church is moving toward an understanding of the relationship between grace and works that draws on Protestant teachings. Such misconceptions prompt me to consider today the Restoration’s unique Atonement doctrine.

God’s plan is developmental

The Lord restored His gospel through Joseph Smith because there had been an apostasy. Since the fifth century, Christianity taught that Adam and Eve’s Fall was a tragic mistake, which led to the belief that humankind has an inherently evil nature. That view is wrong—not only about the Fall and human nature, but about the very purpose of life.

The Fall was not a disaster. It wasn’t a mistake or an accident. It was a deliberate part of the plan of salvation. We are God’s spirit “offspring,”² sent to earth “innocent”³ of Adam’s transgression. Yet our Father’s plan subjects us to temptation and misery in this fallen world as the price to comprehend authentic joy. Without tasting the bitter, we actually *cannot* understand the sweet.⁴ We require mortality’s discipline and refinement as the “next step in [our] development” toward becoming like our Father.⁵ But growth means growing pains. It also means learning from our mistakes in a continual process made possible by the Savior’s grace, which He extends both during and “*after all we can do.*”⁶

Adam and Eve learned constantly from their often harsh experience. They knew how a troubled family feels. Think of Cain and Abel. Yet because of the Atonement, they could *learn from their experience without being condemned by it*. Christ’s sacrifice didn’t just erase their choices and return them to an Eden of innocence. That would be a story with no plot and no character growth. His plan is *developmental*—line upon line, step by step, grace for grace.

So if you have problems in your life, don’t assume there is something wrong with you. Struggling with those problems is at the very core of life’s purpose. As we draw close to God, He will show us our weaknesses and through them make us wiser, stronger.⁷ If you’re seeing more of your weaknesses, that just might mean you’re moving nearer to God, not farther away.

The Savior’s grace helps us grow

One early Australian convert said: “My past life [was] a wilderness of weeds, with hardly a flower Strewed among them. [But] now . . . the weeds have vanished, and flowers Spring up in their place.”⁸

We grow in two ways—removing negative weeds and cultivating positive flowers. The Savior’s grace blesses both parts—if we do our part. First and repeatedly we must uproot the weeds of sin and bad choices. It isn’t enough just to *mow* the weeds. Yank them out by the roots, repenting fully to satisfy the conditions of mercy. But being forgiven is only part of our growth. We are not just paying a debt. Our purpose is to become celestial beings. So once we’ve cleared our heartland, we must continually plant, weed, and nourish the seeds of divine qualities. And then as our sweat and discipline stretch us to meet His gifts, “the flow’rs of grace appear,”⁹ like hope and meekness. Even a tree of life can take root in this heart-garden, bearing fruit so sweet that it lightens all our bur-

dens “through the joy of his Son.”¹⁰ And when the flower of charity blooms here, we will love others with the power of Christ’s own love.¹¹

We must give all we have, as Christ did

We need grace both to overcome sinful weeds and to grow divine flowers. We can do neither one fully by ourselves. But grace is not cheap. It is very expensive, even very *dear*. How much does this grace cost? Is it enough simply to believe in Christ? The man who found the pearl of great price gave “*all that he had*”¹² for it. If we desire “all that [the] Father hath,”¹³ God asks all that we have. To qualify for such exquisite treasure, in whatever way is ours, we must give the way Christ gave—every drop He had: “How exquisite you know not, yea, how hard to bear you know not.”¹⁴ Paul said, “*If so be that we suffer with him*,” we are “joint-heirs with Christ.”¹⁵ All of His heart; all of our hearts.

What possible pearl could be worth such a price—for Him and for us? This earth is not our home. We are away at school, trying to master the lessons of “the great plan of happiness”¹⁶ so we can return home and *know what it means to be there*. Over and over the Lord tells us why the plan is worth our sacrifice—and His. Eve called it “the joy of our redemption.”¹⁷ Jacob called it “that happiness which is prepared for the saints.”¹⁸ Of necessity the plan is full of thorns and tears—His and ours. But because He and we are so totally in this together, our being “at one” with Him in overcoming all opposition will itself bring us “incomprehensible joy.”¹⁹

Christ’s Atonement is at the very core of this plan. Without His dear, dear sacrifice, there would be no way home, no way to be together, no way to be like Him. He gave us all *He* had. Therefore, “how great is *his* joy”²⁰ when even one of us “gets it”—when we look up from the weed patch and turn our face to the Son.

Only the restored gospel has the fullness of these truths! Yet the adversary is

engaged in one of history’s greatest cover-ups, trying to persuade people that this Church knows least—when in fact it knows most—about how our relationship with Christ makes true Christians of us.

Giving *almost* everything is not enough

If we must give all that we have, then our giving only *almost* everything is not enough. If we *almost* keep the commandments, we *almost* receive the blessings. For example, some young people assume they can romp in sinful mud until taking a shower of repentance just before being interviewed for a mission or the temple. In the very act of transgression, some plan to repent. They mock the gift of mercy that true repentance allows.

Some people want to keep one hand on the wall of the temple while touching the world’s “unclean things”²¹ with the other hand. We must put both hands on the temple and hold on for dear life. One hand is not even *almost* enough.

The rich young man had given *almost* everything. When the Savior told him he must sell *all* his possessions, that wasn’t just a story about riches.²² We can have eternal life if we want it, but only if there is *nothing else* we want more.

So we must willingly give everything, because God Himself can’t make us grow against our will and without our full participation. Yet even when we utterly spend ourselves, we lack the power to create the perfection only God can complete. Our *all* by itself is still only *almost* enough—until it is finished by the *all* of Him who is the “finisher of our faith.”²³ At that point, our imperfect but consecrated *almost* is enough.

Observing our covenants by sacrifice

My friend Donna grew up desiring to marry and raise a large family. But that blessing never came. Instead she spent her adult years serving the people in her ward with unmeasured compassion and counseling disturbed children in a large school

district. She had crippling arthritis and many long, blue days. Yet she always lifted and was always lifted by her friends and family. Once when teaching about Lehi's dream, she said with gentle humor, "I'd put myself in that picture on the strait and narrow path, still holding to the iron rod but collapsed from fatigue right on the path." In an inspired blessing given just before her death, Donna's home teacher said the Lord "accepted" her. Donna cried. She had never felt her single life was acceptable. But the Lord said those who "observe their covenants *by sacrifice* . . . are accepted of me."²⁴ I can envision Him walking the path from the tree of life to lift Donna up with gladness and carry her home.

Consider others who, like Donna, have consecrated themselves so fully that, for them, *almost* is enough:

Many missionaries in Europe and similar places who never stop offering their bruised hearts despite continual rejection.

Those handcart pioneers who said they came to know God in their extremities and the price they paid to know Him was a privilege to pay.

A father who reached his outermost limits but still couldn't influence his daughter's choices; he could only crawl toward the Lord, pleading like Alma for his child.

A wife who encouraged her husband despite his years of weakness, until the seeds of repentance finally sprouted in his heart. She said, "I tried to look at him the way Christ would look at me."

A husband whose wife suffered for years from a disabling emotional disorder, but to him it was always "our little challenge"—never just "her illness." In the realm of their marriage, he was afflicted in her afflictions,²⁵ just as Christ in His infinite realm was afflicted in our afflictions.²⁶

"We shall be like him"

The people in 3 Nephi 17 had survived destruction, doubt, and darkness just to get to the temple with Jesus. After listen-

ing to Him for hours in wonder, they grew too weary to comprehend Him. As He prepared to leave, they tearfully looked at Him with such total desire that He stayed and blessed their afflicted ones and their children. They didn't even understand Him, but they wanted to be *with Him* more than they wanted any other thing. So He stayed. Their *almost* was enough.

Almost is especially enough when our own sacrifices somehow echo the Savior's sacrifice, however imperfect we are. We cannot really feel charity—Christ's love for others—without at least tasting His suffering for others, because the love and the suffering are but two sides of a single reality. When we really are afflicted in the afflictions of other people, we may enter "the fellowship of his sufferings"²⁷ enough to become joint-heirs with Him.

May we not shrink when we discover, paradoxically, how dear a price we must pay to receive what is, finally, a gift from Him. When the Savior's all and our all come together, we will find not only forgiveness of sin, "we shall see him as he is," and "we shall be *like him*."²⁸ I love Him. I want to be with Him. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. 2 Nephi 25:26.
2. See Acts 17:28.
3. See Doctrine and Covenants 93:38.
4. See Doctrine and Covenants 29:39.
5. Jeffrey R. Holland, *Christ and the New Covenant: The Messianic Message of the Book of Mormon* (1997), 207.
6. 2 Nephi 25:23; italics added.
7. See Ether 12:27.
8. Martha Maria Humphreys, in Marjorie Newton, *Southern Cross Saints: The Mormons in Australia* (1991), 158.
9. "There Is Sunshine in My Soul Today," *Hymns*, no. 227.
10. Alma 33:23.
11. See Moroni 7:48.
12. Matthew 13:46; italics added; see also Alma 22:15.
13. Doctrine and Covenants 84:38.

14. Doctrine and Covenants 19:15.
15. Romans 8:17; italics added.
16. Alma 42:8.
17. Moses 5:11.
18. 2 Nephi 9:43.
19. Alma 28:8.
20. Doctrine and Covenants 18:13; italics added.
21. Alma 5:57.
22. See Matthew 19:16–22.
23. Hebrews 12:2; see also Moroni 6:4.
24. Doctrine and Covenants 97:8; italics added.
25. See Doctrine and Covenants 30:6.
26. See Doctrine and Covenants 133:53.
27. Philippians 3:10.
28. Moroni 7:48; 1 John 3:2; italics added.

Elder Richard G. Scott

A time of great challenges, opportunities

Excellent suggestions to combat the deteriorating world environment have been given in this conference. As a prophet of God, President Gordon B. Hinckley put world conditions and our opportunities into crystal-clear perspective. Two of his recent comments to priesthood and auxiliary leaders illustrate that prophetic vision. First, regarding the challenge we face:

“The traditional family is under heavy attack. I do not know that things were worse in the times of Sodom and Gomorrah. . . . We see similar conditions today. They prevail all across the world. I think our Father must weep as He looks down upon His wayward sons and daughters.”¹

Now concerning our extraordinary opportunities:

“Who in the earlier days could have dreamed of this season of opportunity in which we live? . . . The Church is in wonderful condition. . . . It will grow and strengthen. . . . It is our opportunity and our challenge to continue in this great undertaking, the future of which we can scarcely imagine.”²

Much evil and darkness in the world

You have a choice. You can wring your hands and be consumed with concern for the future, or you can choose to use the counsel the Lord has given to live with

peace and happiness in a world awash with evil. If you choose to concentrate on the dark side, this is what you will see. Much of the world is being engulfed in a rising river of degenerate filth, with the abandonment of virtue, righteousness, personal integrity, traditional marriage, and family life. Sodom and Gomorrah were the epitome of unholy life in the Old Testament. It was isolated then; now that condition is spread over the world. Satan skillfully manipulates the power of all types of media and communication. His success has greatly increased the extent and availability of such degrading and destructive influences worldwide. In the past, some effort was required to seek out such evil. Now it saturates significant portions of virtually every corner of the world. We cannot dry up the mounting river of evil influences, for they result from the exercise of moral agency divinely granted by our Father. But we can and must, with clarity, warn of the consequences of getting close to its enticing, destructive current.

Plan of happiness blesses all who live it

Now the brighter side. Despite pockets of evil, the world overall is majestically beautiful, filled with many good and sincere people. God has provided a way to live in this world and not be contaminated by the degrading pressures evil agents spread throughout it. You can live a vir-

tuous, productive, righteous life by following the plan of protection created by your Father in Heaven: His plan of happiness. It is contained in the scriptures and in the inspired declarations of His prophets. He clothed your intelligence with spirit and made it possible for you to enjoy the wonder of a physical body. When you use that body in the way He has decreed, you will grow in strength and capacity, avoid transgression, and be abundantly blessed.

When God, our Eternal Father, and His Beloved Son appeared to Joseph Smith in that sublime vision in the Sacred Grove, They began to place on earth again that plan of happiness and all required to sustain it. Part of that restoration included additional sacred scriptures to complement the treasured record of the Bible. These precious scriptures are contained in the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price. Our Father knew of our day. He prepared the scriptures and provided continuing divine guidance to sustain us. That help will ensure that you can live with peace and happiness amid increasing evil.

Consider these verses:

“All things must come to pass in their time. [God knew the challenges we would face when He gave this counsel.]

“Wherefore, be not weary in well-doing, for ye are laying the foundation of a great work. And out of small things proceedeth that which is great.

“Behold, the Lord requireth the heart and a willing mind; and the willing and obedient shall eat the good of the land of Zion in these last days.”³

That is a priceless promise. As you continue to center your mind and heart in Him, He will help you have a rich and full life no matter what happens in the world around you.

Paul wisely taught, “Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.”⁴

We should emulate Joshua: “Choose [ye] this day whom ye will serve; . . . as

for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”⁵

Jesus taught: “Be patient in afflictions, for thou shalt have many; but endure them, for, lo, I am with thee, even unto the end of thy days.”⁶ “He who is faithful shall overcome all things, and shall be lifted up at the last day.”⁷

Finally this pattern of success: “Come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, . . . deny yourselves of all ungodliness, and love God with all your might, mind and strength, . . . that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ.”⁸

I know that the plan of happiness can lift and bless those who live it anywhere.

Taking the gospel to Quiriza, Bolivia

On Christmas Eve 37 years ago, in the light of a full moon, I climbed a small hill in the isolated village of Quiriza, Bolivia. Four young elders and I had spent the day crossing over a mountain pass on a treacherous road. Then we struggled up a riverbed to see if the teachings of the Savior would help a destitute people. What we saw was discouraging—undernourished children, adults subsisting on meager crops, some with eyes glazed from seeking refuge in alcohol and drugs. I looked at the tiny, barren village below—a cluster of adobe, thatched-roof houses beaten by the harsh environment. The only evidence of life was barking dogs searching for food. There was no electricity, telephone, running water, roads, proper sanitation, or doctors there. It seemed so hopeless. Yet a solemn prayer confirmed that we should be there. We found a humble people who embraced the restored gospel with determination to live it. They did that under harsh conditions where severe poverty, alcohol, drugs, witchcraft, and immorality were in plentiful supply.

Under the guidance of exceptional missionaries, the people learned to work hard to cultivate the fields. They produced

a harvest of nutritious vegetables and raised rabbits for better protein. But the best lessons came from beloved missionaries who taught them of a God who loved them, of a Savior who gave His life that they might succeed. Their physical appearance began to change. The light of truth radiated from their happy faces. As devoted, loving emissaries of the Lord, missionaries patiently taught truth to a willing people. Wives and husbands learned how to live in harmony, teach truth to their children, pray, and sense the guidance of the Spirit.

I watched a six-year-old boy who had carefully observed our first baptismal service act out with his younger sister what he had seen. He carefully arranged her hands, raised his tiny arm to the square, mumbled words, gently lowered her into a depression in the sun-baked earth, led her to a rock where he confirmed her, then shook her hand.

The youth learned most quickly. They became obedient to the light of truth taught by the missionaries and in time by their own parents. Through their faith and obedience, I have seen how in one generation, youth baptized in that village have overcome a seemingly hopeless future. Some have been missionaries, graduated from universities, and been sealed in the temple. Through their diligence and obedience, they have found purpose and success in life despite an early harsh physical and evil-saturated environment. If it can be done in Quiriza, Bolivia, it can be done anywhere.

Violating commandments leads to tragedy

Have you noticed how Satan works to capture the mind and emotions with flashing images, blaring music, and the stimulation of every physical sense to excess? He diligently strives to fill life with action, entertainment, and stimulation so that one cannot ponder the consequences of his

tempting invitations. Think of it. Some are tempted to violate the most basic commandments of God because of seductive actions portrayed as acceptable. They are made to seem attractive, even desirable. There seems to be no serious consequence, but rather apparent lasting joy and happiness. But recognize that those performances are controlled by scripts and actors. The outcome of decisions made is likewise manipulated to be whatever the producer wants.

Life is not that way. Yes, moral agency allows you to choose what you will, but you cannot control the outcome of those choices. Unlike the false creations of man, our Father in Heaven determines the consequences of your choices. Obedience will yield happiness, while violation of His commandments will not.

Consider the lives of those who create what for some are captivating images of life. They generally turn to the most vicious of the destructive influences they depict so appealingly in the media. They may be wealthy, but they are miserable and without conscience. Truly the statement of Alma, an inspired prophet and compassionate father, is borne out in their lives: "Wickedness never was happiness."⁹

If you are ever tempted to experiment with the alluring offerings of Lucifer, first calmly analyze the inevitable consequences of such choices, and your life will not be shattered. You cannot ever sample those things that are forbidden of God as destructive of happiness and corrosive to spiritual guidance without tragic results.

If you have become entangled in sin from poor choices, please decide to come back now. You know how to begin. Do it now. We love you. We need you. God will help you.

God will guide you to happiness

As a young man or woman, though life may seem difficult now, hold on to that

iron rod of truth. You are making better progress than you realize. Your struggles are defining character, discipline, and confidence in the promises of your Father in Heaven and the Savior as you consistently obey Their commandments. You are so important. You are so needed. There are so few willing to make the sacrifice you are making to live righteously. You can develop the sensitivity, love, and kindness to gain supreme happiness within the covenant of an eternal marriage. You will bless your children with insight the world can never give them. Your example will set the course for their successful life as the world becomes even more difficult. You are needed to strengthen the growing kingdom of the Lord and to be role models for so many who lack the light of truth you have.

Avoid worldly wickedness. Know that God is in control. In time, Satan will completely fail and be punished for his perverse evil. God has a specific plan for your life. He will reveal parts of that plan to you as you look for it with faith and consistent obedience. His Son has made you free—not from the consequences of your acts, but free to make choices. God’s eternal purpose is for you to be successful in this mortal life. No matter how wicked the world becomes, you can earn that blessing. Seek and be attentive to the personal guidance given to you through the Holy Spirit. Continue to be worthy to receive it. Reach out to others who stumble and are perplexed, not certain of what path to follow.

Your security is in God your Father and His Beloved Son, Jesus Christ. As one of His Apostles authorized to bear witness of Him, I solemnly testify that I know that

the Savior lives, that He is a resurrected, glorified personage of perfect love. He is your hope, your Mediator, your Redeemer. Through obedience, let Him guide you to peace and happiness amid increased evil in the world, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. “Standing Strong and Immovable,” *Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting*, Jan. 10, 2004, 20.
2. In Conference Report, Oct. 2003, 3, 5; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2003, 4, 7.
3. Doctrine and Covenants 64:32–34.
4. Romans 12:21.
5. Joshua 24:15.
6. Doctrine and Covenants 24:8.
7. Doctrine and Covenants 75:16.
8. Moroni 10:32.
9. Alma 41:10.

President Monson

As we conclude the conference, we express appreciation to the Tabernacle Choir, the Relief Society choir from stakes in Salt Lake, the priesthood choir from the Orem and Salt Lake institutes, and their conductors and organists for the beautiful and inspiring music. The music has been wonderful. We also extend thanks to all who have participated in any way in these proceedings.

President Gordon B. Hinckley, our beloved prophet, will be our concluding speaker at this session. Following President Hinckley’s remarks, the choir will sing “Lord, I Would Follow Thee.” The benediction will then be offered by Elder Daryl H. Garn of the Seventy, and the conference will be adjourned for six months.

President Gordon B. Hinckley

Resolve to stand a little taller

My brothers and sisters, it’s about over. As we conclude this historic confer-

ence, the words of Rudyard Kipling’s immortal “Recessional” come to mind:

The tumult and the shouting dies;
The captains and the kings depart.

Still stands thine ancient sacrifice,
 An humble and a contrite heart.
 Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,
 Lest we forget, lest we forget.
 ["God of Our Fathers, Known of Old,"
Hymns, no. 80]

As we return to our homes, may we carry with us the spirit of this great convocation. May what we have heard and experienced remain with us as a residual of love and peace, an attitude of repentance, and a resolve to stand a little taller in the radiant sunlight of the gospel.

May our testimonies of the great foundation principles of this work, which have been burnished more brightly, shine forth from our lives and our actions.

May a spirit of love, of peace, of appreciation for one another increase in our homes. May we be prospered in our labors and become more generous in our sharings. May we reach out to those about us in friendship and respect.

May our prayers become expressions of thanks to the Giver of all good and of love for Him who is our Redeemer.

Appreciation for Sister Hinckley

Now, my brothers and sisters, I reluctantly desire a personal indulgence for a moment. Some of you have noticed the absence of Sister Hinckley. For the first time in 46 years, since I became a General Authority, she has not attended general conference. Earlier this year we were in Africa to dedicate the Accra Ghana Temple. On leaving there we flew to Sal, a barren island in the Atlantic, where we met with members of a local branch. We then flew to St. Thomas, an island in the Caribbean. There we met with a few others of our members. We were on our way home when she collapsed with weariness. She's had a difficult time ever since. She's now 92, a little

younger than I am. I guess the clock is winding down, and we do not know how to rewind it.

It is a somber time for me. We've been married for 67 years this month. She is the mother of our five gifted and able children, the grandmother of 25 grandchildren and a growing number of great-grandchildren. We've walked together side by side through all of these years, coequals and companions through storm and sunshine. She has spoken far and wide in testimony of this work, imparting love, encouragement, and faith wherever she's gone. Women have written letters of appreciation from all over the world. We continue to hope and pray for her and express from the depths of our hearts our appreciation for all who have attended her and looked after her and for your great faith and prayers in her behalf. Now, as we go to our homes, I feel to say:

God be with you till we meet again;
 By his counsels guide, uphold you. . . .
 When life's perils thick confound you,
 Put his arms unfailing round you. . . .
 Keep love's banner floating o'er you;
 Smite death's threat'ning wave before
 you.

God be with you till we meet again.
 ["God Be with You Till We Meet
 Again," *Hymns*, no. 152]

Every man, woman, and child, boy and girl, should leave this conference a better individual than he or she was when it began two days ago. I leave my blessing and my love with each of you, in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

The choir sang "Lord, I Would Follow Thee."

Elder Daryl H. Garn offered the benediction.

SUMMARY OF CONFERENCE MUSIC

The Tabernacle Choir provided the music for the Saturday morning, Sunday morning, and Sunday afternoon sessions. Craig Jessop and Mack Wilberg directed the choir. Clay Christiansen, Richard Elliott, Linda Margetts, and Bonnie Goodliffe were the organists.

Music for the Saturday afternoon session was provided by a Relief Society choir from stakes in Salt Lake. Vanja Watkins directed the choir, and Bonnie Goodliffe was the organist.

Music for the priesthood session was provided by a priesthood choir from the

Orem and Salt Lake institutes. Douglas Brenchley, Don Keaton, and Ryan Eggett directed the choir, and John Longhurst was the organist.

Throughout the conference sessions, prelude, postlude, and interlude music and accompaniments on the organ were played by John Longhurst, Clay Christiansen, Richard Elliott, Linda Margetts, and Bonnie Goodliffe.

F. Michael Watson

Clerk of the Conference

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